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Non sono solo *immagini*

Visualizing the language of image-based sexual abuse online

**Non sono solo immagini. Visualizing
the language of image-based sexual
abuse online**

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*Le parole mi hanno ferito
le parole mi hanno guarito.*
(Benni 1992: 209)

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Abstract

In the last years, the way people communicate has radically transformed: thanks to digital technologies, and in particular online platforms, new relational possibilities have opened up, together with new forms of violence. One of them is image-based sexual abuse, the non-consensual distribution and/or creation of private sexual material. This type of violence is perpetrated daily within vast online communities to the detriment of mainly unaware victims. Image-based sexual abuse is a form of sexual violence that can be considered gender-based because it affects almost exclusively women. However, the phenomenon is still relatively unexplored, and its communication is mainly entrusted to mass media, which often report it with a sensationalist tone that lacks respect for the victims and their pain. On the other hand, public opinion frequently condemns those who suffer the abuse and diminishes image-based sexual abuse as a lesser form of violence or a prank because it is made up of images and not “real” actions.

The thesis aims to study the practices of image-based sexual abuse and the role of platforms in their implementation, focusing not on the victims but on the perpetrators. The opportunity identified to obtain this shift in perspective (from victims to perpetrators) is that of online vernacular language, the set of expressions, styles, and grammars peculiar to digital communities. The main research questions are: **“How and on which digital platforms image-based sexual abuse is practised?”**, **“What are the characteristics of the vernacular of image-based sexual abuse in these platforms?”**, **“What are the characteristics of the image-based sexual abuse that emerge from the communications between the perpetrators?”**.

The answers to these questions are organized and displayed in *“Non sono solo immagini”*, a site designed to educate and raise awareness on image-based sexual abuse using the evidence from the research carried out on online vernacular language. The project is a collection of artefacts designed to analyze the communications and practices of those who perpetrate violence to provide the user with the tools to initiate a critical reflection on the subject that could be the first step towards social change.



Preface

The preface provides an overview of the research subject – the vernacular of image-based sexual abuse online – and the structure of the thesis. It then presents a declaration on the ethics upheld during the research, design, and writing of the thesis (0.1), and concludes with a warning about the characteristics of the studied and reported content (0.2).

New technologies have been changing people's way of communication for years, a change that, far from being definitive, continues to keep pace with the continuous technological evolution. Communications between people have become faster, more immediate, and more far-reaching. Any individual with access to an internet connection and an adequate device can speak in real-time with others, regardless of geographical distance, using different means such as messages or calls, but also video or images. This change has opened up a series of infinite possibilities that, in many ways, have simplified life and relationships between people. However, it has also modified and expanded how an individual can act violently towards another, creating space for a series of aggressive and harassing behaviours facilitated by the technical and structural characteristics of new technologies and digital platforms (websites, apps, etc.) that make them possible.

One of the new forms of violence that has received a lot of media attention is the so-called revenge porn. This term usually refers to the scenario where a person, usually an ex-partner, shares intimate images of another person to harm and humiliate them. In reality, in most cases, the phenomenon has little to do with revenge, which is rarely the motivation of the perpetrator:

[...] la vendetta non è necessariamente la matrice che spinge alla diffusione di pratiche violente: al contrario, sono più il gioco e la normalizzazione di certi atti e certe forme di 'goliardia' a portare molte persone a condividere con leggerezza le immagini intime altrui. ¹ (Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 44)

Academic literature has offered several alternatives to revise the terminology used to refer to the aforementioned practices; the one chosen in the thesis is image-based sexual abuse, a term coined by McGlynn and Rackley (2017) that is more comprehensive and accurate. Comprehensive because it defines the set of practices that involve the distribution and/or non-consensual creation of private sexual material, including a range of other actions beyond the non-consensual sharing of private material. Accurate because it removes from its wording the presumed motivation of the perpetrators (revenge) and the term "pornography," which is incorrect when referring to private images; but also because it more clearly places the practices it consists of within the context of sexual violence.

So, the object of research of this thesis is image-based sexual abuse, in this inclusive meaning of different

¹ Tr. en.: "[...] revenge is not necessarily the driving force behind the spread of violent practices, on the contrary, it is often the playfulness and normalization of certain acts and forms of 'pranks' that lead many people to casually share intimate images of others."

practices. The phenomenon is composed of different actions and intentions, however, it is undeniable that it is image-based, that is, the fact that it is based on images, which are the very foundation on which abuse is constituted. Private sexual images are distributed or created—for example, taken in secret or obtained through manipulation and photo-montage—and then distributed non-consensually every day among individuals, but also within wider communities. The proliferation of these practices is made possible by a series of digital platforms that enable the use of new technology resources, such as social networks or messaging services. Therefore, they will also be investigated in the thesis to study how their intrinsic characteristics facilitate the creation of communities in which image-based sexual abuse can be carried out. Finally, it is precisely these digital communities and interactions between users that are the focus of the research, as they allow for investigating image-based sexual abuse at its root, observing the behaviours and language of those who practice it.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. In chapter 1, the phenomenon of non-consensual distribution and/or creation of intimate images within society is contextualized, drawing on the help of expert research and publications. The chapter begins by defining image-based sexual abuse and examining its strengths (1.1), such as the flexibility of the definition that is expanded in 1.2 by adding other cases. It then places image-based sexual abuse within the broader context of gender-based violence (1.3), as a phenomenon that disproportionately affects women. With this clarification, the chapter continues to analyze the social and cultural foundations of image-based sexual abuse, traced back to rape culture (1.4) and double standards on sexuality (1.5): two concepts theorized and explored by feminist literature that illustrate how, in society, sexual violence is normalized as a means of punishing female sexuality when it appears to deviate from a presumed norm. The chapter goes on to examine sexting as a case study (1.6) precisely because, during its execution, intimate images are often created and consensually shared, which sometimes become the subject of non-consensual distribution. It then reflects on the fact that those who practice image-based sexual abuse are often male (1.7), tracing an analysis of two aspects that contribute to the construction of masculinity: friendly relationships between men (homosociality) and comparison with a dominant standard (hegemonic masculinity). Some forms of online masculinity are then analyzed, as well as how they come together to promote a message of resentment towards women that often leads to

violent acts justified as punishment (1.8). In 1.9, the concept of secondary victimization is the focus, used as a starting point to discuss the media narrative (1.9.1) and the Italian public opinion (1.9.1) on image-based sexual abuse. Finally, chapter 1 concludes with a focus on the Italian situation through an analysis of the current laws in place (1.10).

Chapter 2 recounts the investigations conducted for the thesis and starts with the definition, in 2.1, of the research area, that is, the online vernacular language of image-based sexual abuse, that is, the peculiar language used by its members as a sign of recognition. It continues with a review of academic literature and expert investigations (2.2) on both online vernacular language (2.2.1) and image-based sexual abuse (2.2.2) and then analyzes the function of digital platforms and their characteristics in enabling the phenomenon (2.2.3), stating that the platforms chosen for the investigation are 4chan (2.2.3.1) and Telegram (2.2.3.2), explaining the reasons behind the choices. Subsequently, the research questions and protocols developed to investigate various aspects of the vernacular of image-based sexual abuse specifically on these platforms are presented (2.3). The protocols focus on an investigation of practices and languages in the two platforms, delving into those communities where image-based sexual abuse is commonplace. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the most significant findings (2.4), laying the groundwork for defining project opportunities.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the description of “Non sono solo immagini” (It's not *just images*), the website designed to showcase the research findings. It starts with a statement of the project goals, which can be summarized as the intent to raise awareness and educate on image-based sexual abuse, by shifting the narrative focus from victims to perpetrators (3.1). The chapter continues with a reflection on the ethics of online amplification, meaning that even through critical narratives there is always a risk in giving visibility to aggressive, vulgar, and derogatory behaviours and language, but there are also risks in not talking about them (3.2). This issue creates an eternal dilemma of “to do or not to do” that does not have a clear solution, so it was chosen to present three case studies that lay the groundwork for a more conscious design (3.2.1). The chapter proceeds with a reflection on the design methodology used (3.3), which drew from the basics of adversarial design (3.3.1) and studies on the intersection of communication design and translation (3.3.2). In 3.4, the project is described through an overview that starts from the design choices and goes into detail to describe the sections of the website, presenting images of its prototype.

Finally, the last chapter is dedicated to the conclusions: a series of reflections on the project contributions and future developments of the work presented in the thesis.

0.1 Ethics

In the thesis, several ethical choices are reiterated, given the nature of the phenomenon and the spaces that have been investigated, which is useful to anticipate and summarize already now.

First of all, it is important to always keep in mind that image-based sexual abuse is a form of violence perpetrated through images. Therefore, there is a large amount of photographic or video material to be analyzed, but it would be deeply wrong to analyze it and even more so to present it to others. In fact, it must be remembered that the viewing of these images is itself the form of abuse suffered by the victim, which is why it has been chosen not to contribute to prolonging and amplifying it by exposing it to further looks. Therefore, the only images taken from the platforms presented in this thesis are adequately censored screenshots, used in small quantities and for explanatory purposes in two sections of the designed website.

Secondly, particular attention has been paid to preserving the anonymity of the victims of image-based sexual abuse—only in 1.9.1 were cases that received great media attention reported, reporting the names of the victims—so any request or comment that included personal information has been deleted. Care has also been taken to maintain the anonymity of the members of the analyzed communities, for 4chan it was automatic, given that its functioning is based on anonymity; in the case of Telegram, usernames or other identifying factors were omitted.

Finally, where possible, efforts were made not to make the analyzed communities easily accessible in order not to increase their users. Unfortunately, for 4chan, it was practically impossible, in fact, the studied section can be reached directly from the homepage of the site, so it is very easy to access it; one can only hope that the obscure mechanisms of functioning and creation of communities that characterize 4chan discourage potential new users. For Telegram, on the other hand, it was chosen to omit the name of all the channels and groups reached, including those analyzed, which are cited as “Group A,” “Group B,” “Group C” and “Group D,” hoping to make it at least difficult - if not impossible - to find them.

0.2 Trigger Warning

One final topic to address before moving forward is that of the content presented in the thesis. As briefly explained in the preceding paragraphs, the research focuses on image-based sexual abuse, which is a form of sexual violence, and has been conducted in communities where these violent practices are carried out through an aggressive, vulgar, and denigrating language that often dehumanizes victims—especially women—treating them as sexual objects to be freely used.

This is why several topics will be discussed within the thesis that may trigger unpleasant memories or sensations. We are not just talking about “offending sensitivities,” which in some cases is necessary—for example, when trying to break down prejudices and offer different perspectives as in this case—but rather the risk of reliving experiences of discomfort or pain.

Speaking for the first—and only—time within the thesis in first person and as a woman, I want to emphasize that it was very difficult for me to read many of the contents I studied. Every woman has inevitably experienced her share of violence, harassment, unwanted attention, gendered insults, and aggressive behaviour: being faced with so much normalized violence, and even considered amusing, was extremely depressing and brought back a series of unpleasant sensations and memories as well as a deep sense of helplessness. As the research continued, the sense of helplessness turned into anger, and anger into a desire for denunciation and change. It is in this perspective that I want to present my project and hope it will be accepted, because I have come to understand that reporting serves to educate and raise awareness, and these are the first necessary steps towards initiating change.

However, everyone should have the opportunity to choose whether or not to expose themselves to content that may cause so much discomfort, which is why I believe it is deeply important to warn of their presence within this thesis so that everyone can make an informed and free decision.

Chapter 1

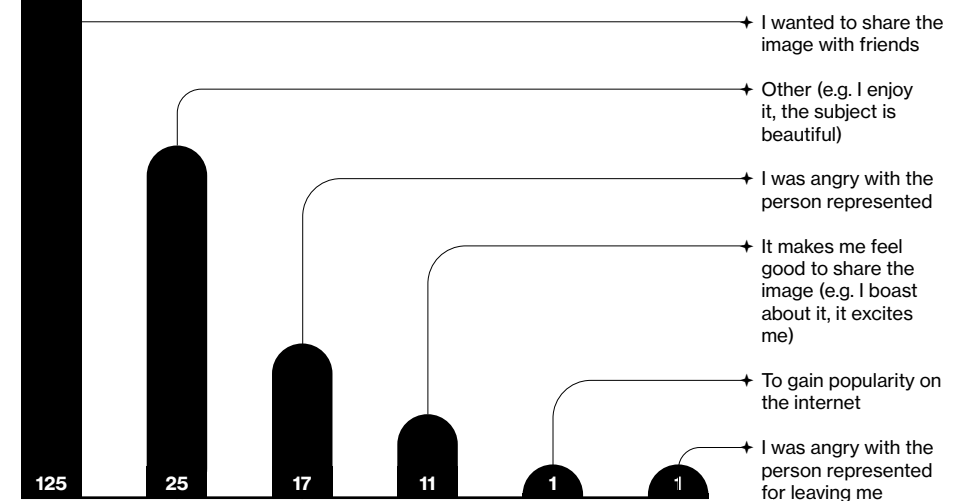
**Beyond Revenge
Porn**

This chapter defines image-based sexual abuse by tracing its cultural and social foundations. It begins with a critical glossary of commonly used and academic terminology (1.1), expands its definition (1.2), and places the phenomenon within the context of gender-based violence (1.3). It then details the cultural foundations through certain feminist concepts (1.4, 1.5) and men's studies (1.7, 1.8) by linking them through the practical example of sexting (1.6). Finally, it connects to the phenomenon of secondary victimization (1.9) to discuss the perception of the Italian press and public opinion (1.9.1, 1.9.2), concluding with a review of current laws (1.10).

1.1 From Revenge Porn to Image-Based Sexual Abuse

The term revenge porn, which has become common in recent years thanks to growing media attention, refers to the sharing of someone else's intimate images without their consent and with the purpose of damaging or humiliating them (cf. Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 43). However, this definition is limiting, dangerous, and incorrect. In fact, those who share the material often do not do so for revenge purposes (fig. 01), as shown, for example, by the research conducted in 2017 by the *Cyber Civil Rights Initiative*. Furthermore, the word "revenge" assumes that the victim has committed an action that deserves punishment, thus risking blaming them while empathizing with the perpetrator (see Bainotti, Semenzin 2021). Finally, talking about pornography is inappropriate in the context of non-consensual sharing of intimate material, as taking an explicit image in the context of a private relationship does not equate to creating pornography (cf. Hall, Hearn 2018: 15).

← **Fig. 01**
The responses of 159 perpetrators to the question: "why did you share someone else's intimate images without their consent?"



To replace this term, the academic and feminist worlds have proposed different alternatives. The first is non-consensual pornography (see Ruvalcaba, Eaton 2019; Uhl et al. 2018), that is, non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit images regardless of the motivation. The second is non-consensual dissemination of intimate images (see Semenzin, Bainotti 2020; 2021), literally non-consensual sharing of intimate images, which gives a more accurate name to the material. However, also these terms exclude some cases that may be encountered, for this purpose, McGynn and Rackley (2017) coined the broader term image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), which will be adopted from now on in this thesis.

Advances in technology have transformed and expanded the ways in which sexual violence can be perpetrated. One of these new manifestations of violence and abuse is the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of private sexual images: a phenomenon we have conceptualised as image-based sexual abuse. (McGynn, Rackley 2017: 534).

This definition includes a broader range of practices that were poorly represented by other terms. First of all, it includes the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, not excluding those obtained through theft or hacking,² and it includes not only the first distributors of the material but also the secondary ones—who allow it to become viral—and the platforms that make it possible.

Furthermore, is added the issue of non-consensual creation of sexual images, which includes various practices, increasingly made possible by technological advancement. Just think, for example, of upskirting,³ the practice of secretly filming or photographing under a victim's skirt in order to capture intimate areas (see Hall, Hearn, Lewis 2021). Or spy images, sometimes obtained through the use of hidden cameras (spy cam), in which the subject is unaware of being filmed, or even videos made during sexual assaults. But it also includes the manipulation of images for the purpose of making them sexual (sexualised photoshopping): in this case, usually, the person portrayed is aware of the existence of the photograph, but not of subsequent modifications. Another form of manipulation, automated and increasingly frequent, is that of deepfake⁴ porn, which allows for the creation of realistic images and/or videos by replacing the faces of porn actors with those of other people. Explicit images can be produced non-consensually even if the victim is aware of their creation. This is the case with sextortion, a combina-

² Hacking is the set of methods, techniques, and operations aimed at knowing, accessing, and modifying a computer system.

³ A similar practice is that of downblousing, which however aims to film or photograph the victim's cleavage.

⁴ Deepfake is a technique for human image synthesis based on artificial intelligence, used to combine and overlap existing images and videos with original videos or images.

[...] the label 'revenge porn' is routinely used as a catch-all phrase to include a wide variety of non-consensual image-based harms. However, while this term resonates with the public, its use is problematic. Not only does it refer to a relatively small, albeit pernicious, subset of private sexual images, it also concentrates on the motives of perpetrators, rather on the harms to victim-survivors.

(McGlynn, Rackley 2017: 535-536)

Psychological Well-Being Index – a higher value indicates a higher level of well-being

20.31 Victims

21.18 Non-victims

Somatic Symptom Scale – a higher value indicates a higher level of physical problems

11.26 Victims

9.34 Non-victims

tion of the words sexting (1.6) and extortion, that is, coercing a person—usually through extortion or blackmail—to send private photos in chat.

Another strength of this term is that it communicates the extent of the harm suffered by the victims, clearly placing image-based sexual abuse among forms of sexual violence (cf. McGynn, Rackley 2017: 536-537). This association is not automatic since efforts to classify such practices as sexual violence go against a social current that classifies them as less real threats and without repercussions for the victim (cf. Fairbairn 2015: 235). However, image-based sexual abuse deeply violates the personal and physical integrity, privacy, and dignity of those who suffer it. The consequences are not only real, but they are also similar to those experienced by victims of physical sexual violence (fig. 02).

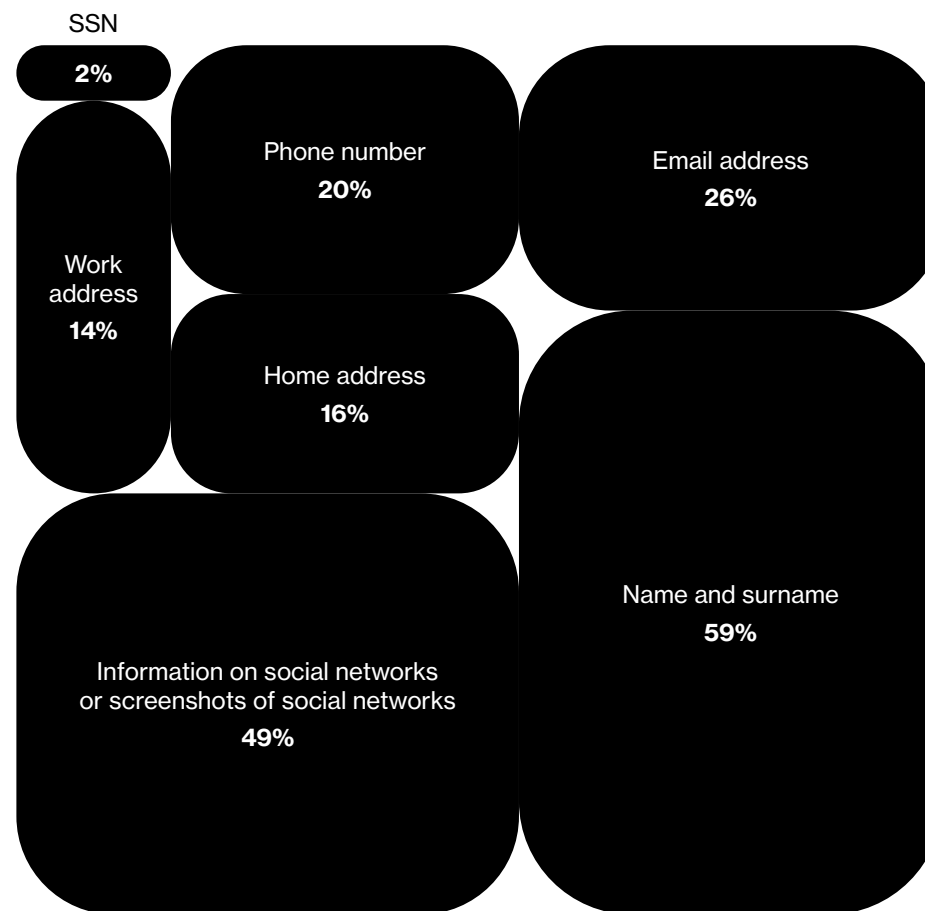
Several studies show that survivors of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) report lower levels of psychological well-being (see Ruvalcaba, Eaton 2019; Uhl et al. 2018) and exhibit symptoms such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts (see Bates 2016). These repercussions are often amplified by collateral practices associated with image-based sexual abuse, such as doxxing, which involves sharing the victim's personal information (Fig. 03). This further exposes the victim and allows search engines to associate the sexual private images with the subject, who can then be easily found by typing their name and surname. Given the difficulty of removing data from the internet, it is easy to imagine how doxxing can damage the victim's private and

↑ **Fig. 02**
Victims of non-consensual sharing of intimate images have reported poorer mental health scores and higher levels of physiological problems than non-victims.

→ **Fig. 03**
The kind of personal information of victims shared non-consensually along with private sexual images.

professional relationships. Making public the information of those in intimate images increases the risks of online harassment and stalking⁵, generating in survivors anxiety of persecution and fear for their safety (see Ruvalcaba, Eaton 2019; Uhl et al. 2018). It is therefore correct to classify image-based sexual abuse as sexual violence, as the academic literature has been suggesting for years.

⁵ Stalking is a set of repeated and intrusive harassing behaviours, such as threats, following, or harassment, carried out by a person towards their victim.



1.2 Expanding Image-Based Sexual Abuse: Cyber Rape and Tribute

As seen in the previous paragraph, image-based sexual abuse encompasses a range of practices and maintains the potential to include those that may arise in the future. However, by definition, it excludes some already existing practices that are regularly carried out and that violate the intimacy of the victims in the same way. The first is that of cyber rape, which occurs when one or more people comment on images of others with explicit sexual fantasies:

A differenziare questo tipo di commenti dai comuni apprezzamenti – comunque spesso non meno caratterizzati da un latente sessismo di difficile eradicazione – sono alcuni elementi che vanno dal tono estremamente pesante di epiteti e fantasie, alla (a volte solo iniziale) inconsapevolezza delle vittime del fatto che le proprie immagini [...] vengano utilizzate per incitare a pensieri, comportamenti e pratiche sessuali, spesso violente.⁶ (Striano 2018: 97)

⁶ Tr. en.: “To differentiate these types of comments from common compliments – which are often characterized by latent and difficult-to-eradicate sexism – there are certain elements that range from the extremely heavy tone of epithets and fantasies to the (sometimes only initial) unawareness of victims that their own images [...] are being used to incite thoughts, behaviours, and often violent sexual practices.”

The images used for these fantasies do not necessarily depict private moments, in fact, they are often common photos “stolen” from social media. This type of material is also used in “tribute,” a practice that involves the perpetrator masturbating over the image of a victim with the aim of sharing the result.

Both actions do not fall within the current definition of image-based sexual abuse because they do not necessarily involve private sexual images. However, the violation caused remains real, connected to the sphere of sexuality and undeniably image-based. Therefore, in this paper, I have decided to include them within image-based sexual abuse, whose definition can be expanded to include these cases as well. In fact, in addition to having similar repercussions on victims, they activate the same cultural and social structures, which will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Quando si parla di «violenza di genere» si fa riferimento a un insieme molto eterogeneo di forme di violenza agite contro le donne in quanto appartenenti al genere femminile. Questa appartenenza corrisponde ancora oggi a una posizione di svantaggio e di subordinazione all'interno della struttura sociale e del rapporto tra i generi proprio della nostra cultura.

Giomi, Magaraggia 2017: capitolo 1

Tr. en.: “When we talk about 'gender-based violence', we refer to a very heterogeneous set of forms of violence committed against women because they belong to the female gender. This membership still corresponds today to a position of disadvantage and subordination within the social structure and the relationship between genders that is characteristic of our culture.”

1.3 Image-Based Sexual Abuse as Gender-Based Violence

The Istanbul Convention⁷ (2011) defines violence against women as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination against women that includes all acts of gender-based violence that result in or may result in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, both in public and private life. It also specifies that:

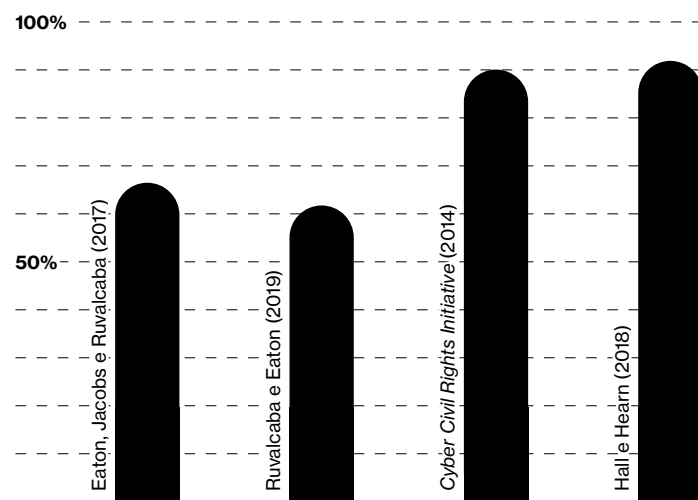
L'espressione "violenza contro le donne basata sul genere" designa qualsiasi violenza diretta contro una donna in quanto tale, o che colpisce le donne in modo sproporzionato.⁸ (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, Serie generale n. 53: art. 3)

⁷ The Istanbul Convention is an international treaty against violence against women and domestic violence, approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2011.

⁸ Tr. en.: «The term 'gender-based violence against women' refers to any violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.»

Having established that image-based sexual abuse is a form of sexual violence and given the definition of gender-based violence against women, it is time to reflect on the numbers of image-based sexual abuse.

In recent years, several studies and investigations have considered the gender of the victims. The results are clear and indicate that the majority of them are women (**fig. 04**). In the 2017 questionnaire conducted by Eaton, Jacobs, and Ruvalcaba for the *Cyber Civil Rights Initiative*, 15.8% of



← **Fig. 04**
Percentage of female victims in various studies and surveys.

women reported having had their intimate images shared or being threatened with their release, compared to 9.3% of men. This means that, overall, 66.6% of the victims were female. A similar figure was found in the 2019 questionnaire by Ruvalcaba and Eaton, in which women accounted for 61.9% of the victims, while in 2014, according to the *Cyber Civil Rights Initiative*, the figure was 90%. Similar figures were also found in research on shared material: women's images made up 91.8% of those analyzed on various websites in 2018 by Uhl et al., while they accounted for 90% of those found by Hall and Hearn in the same year on MyEx.com.⁹ Therefore, image-based sexual abuse, like many forms of sexual violence:

⁹ MyEx.com was a free revenge porn website where people had the ability to post private images of their ex-partners along with their name and other information.

[...] belongs to that class of activities that includes rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment – that is, the class of activities overwhelmingly (though of course not solely) perpetrated by men and directed overwhelmingly (again, not solely) at women. (Franks 2013: ¶ 3)

Therefore, it is evident that it should be considered a form of gender-based violence against women, and as such, its cultural roots can be analyzed.

1.4 Rape Culture

In 1993, Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth defined rape culture as a set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and support violence against women. It is a culture in which violence is seen as erotic, and sexuality as violent, where gender violence is accepted, justified and normalized, and rape is only the most extreme form of it, in a continuum that is assumed to be inevitable both by women and men (cf. Buchwald, Fletcher, Roth 1993: vii).

¹⁰ Tr. en.: "Rape culture manifests itself in more or less subtle forms and through various modalities. We notice its presence by observing how rape continues to be considered an accepted and recognized way to punish and humiliate a woman, and to restore a patriarchal power."

Rape culture is a complex phenomenon, a cultural substrate that guides practices and discourses in a given society and that people acquire from a young age, in the family, at school, and through the media (cf. Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 38).

La cultura dello stupro si mostra in forme più o meno sottili e attraverso diverse modalità. Ci accorgiamo della sua presenza osservando come lo stupro continui ad essere considerato un modo accettato e riconosciuto per punire e umiliare una donna e per ristabilire un potere di matrice patriarcale.¹⁰ (Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 34)

La cultura dello stupro non è però solamente qualcosa di passivo. Anzi, viene mantenuta e alimentata anche dalle pratiche dei singoli individui, dalle interazioni tra di loro, dal contesto mediale in cui tutti e tutte ci troviamo. La cultura dello stupro orienta le nostre pratiche e si costruisce attraverso di esse, e nessuno di noi si può dire completamente immune da questo sostrato culturale e sociale.

(Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 38)

Tr. en.: "However, rape culture is not merely a passive entity. On the contrary, it is also maintained and fueled by the practices of individuals, their interactions with each other, and the media context in which we all find ourselves. Rape culture shapes our practices and is constructed through them, and none of us can claim to be completely immune to this cultural and social substrate."

1. Beyond Revenge Porn

The function of rape culture is to establish what behaviours are considered appropriate for each gender while punishing those who do not adhere to them. Therefore, it provides fertile ground for the acceptance and normalization of misogynistic and violent behaviours, which are used on one hand to preserve one's power and on the other hand to defend one's identity (see Bainotti, Semenzin 2021; Giomi, Magaraggia 2017).

The fact that rape culture dictates what behaviours are deemed appropriate also leads to another important aspect within it, namely the tendency to blame the victim. This often happens when talking about image-based sexual abuse, in fact, according to Eikren and Ingram:

Responses to revenge porn victims echo a bifurcation found in broader discourses on violence, especially sexual violence, against women: one, that women are more likely than men to be victims of sexual violence because of their gender; and two, that women victims of sexual violence bring it on themselves. (2021: 1)

One needs only to think of common comments like "you should expect it if you take certain photos," which in tone and intention are closely assimilable to phrases such as "she asked for it, given how she was dressed" or "what was she doing in that bar at that time," which are not uncommon to hear about rape victims. In this way, attention is shifted onto the victim and the role of the perpetrator is lightened (cf. Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 34).

Not only that, often the blame shifts to the victim, stigmatizing and insulting them for exhibiting behaviours deemed inappropriate for the female gender (slut shaming), such as perceived sexual availability (cf. Eirken, Ingram 2021: 4), thus highlighting the role of violence as a form of punishment. These are the ways in which rape culture triggers gendered and violent practices associated with image-based sexual abuse. But not only that, but it also favours the existence of different criteria for judging the sexuality and behaviour of males and females, which contribute to the pervasiveness of this violence.

Before moving on, however, it is necessary to make two additional clarifications. Firstly, highlighting the issues of rape culture does not mean starting a battle against men. As already emphasized, we are talking about a cultural substrate that permeates everyone's daily life, and it is not uncommon for women to engage in misogynistic behaviour in an attempt to gain an advantage, sometimes, like everyone else, unconsciously. Secondly, when talking about the victimization of

women and gender-based violence, it is not intended to make them helpless victims. On the contrary, the female agency¹¹ in combating and overcoming violence is fully recognized by breaking free from the passive and immobile condition that the term victim implies. Therefore, the terms survivor or victim/survivor should be preferred.

¹¹ "Agency" is a sociological concept defined as the capacity of individuals to act autonomously in specific situations and make their own decisions.

1.5 Virgins or Vamps: the Double Standard on Female Sexuality

There has been mention of the existence of a double standard in judging the behaviours of women and men, which often: "[...] emerge quando la sessualità maschile viene giudicata libera, potente e incontrollabile e quella femminile sottomessa, oblativa, orientata alla riproduzione" (Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 29-30). This, in everyday life, translates into a series of stereotyped judgments deeply rooted in society, such as speaking in derogatory terms about a woman who has had a high (or perceived high) number of male partners but congratulating men who have had many relationships. The same method of evaluation means that the creation and/or non-consensual distribution of private sexual images is seen as a harmless joke by perpetrators whose hypersensitive victims lack a sense of humour (cf. McGlynn, Rackley 2017: 549) or "they asked for it."

¹² The double standard consists of the application of different judgment principles for similar situations or for different people who are in the same situation.

¹³ Tr. en.: "[...] emerges when male sexuality is judged as free, powerful and uncontrollable, and female sexuality as submissive, oblate, and reproduction-oriented"

¹⁴ "Vamp" is the cinematic femme fatale, a seductive woman who uses her sexual appeal to manipulate men.

In this system, women are confronted with a well-defined criterion and when they step outside of it, they become either too uninhibited and explicit or, on the contrary, too prudish and reserved. This double standard is well described by Benedict (1992) in her analysis of the press narrative surrounding rape victims. The author explains how a series of rigid moral standards reinforce false myths about rape, creating two categories of victims: vamps¹⁴ and virgins. This type of narrative exonerates the aggressor in both cases: in the first, it is the woman who provoked and seduced him; in the second, the man has attacked an innocent and pure creature, becoming an irrational monster. The trope of the vamp once again shows how rape is considered a punishment tool against women who have dared to express their sexuality. Benedict identified eight factors that lead public opinion to identify a victim as a vamp, and it is no coincidence that one of these is any deviation from the traditional role of women at home and/or with children. Indeed, people are more likely

Revenge porn is not gender neutral. Sexual double standards are widely applied to women's and men's sexual activity in society (e.g., slut/stud), and attitudes and beliefs that women's behaviour provokes sexual violence are deeply ingrained. Thus, the nature and consequences of revenge porn are more severe for women than men.

(Fairbairn 2015: 242)

to blame a victim if she was in a bar, at a party, or alone in a place where “good girls” should not be (cf. Benedict 1992: 19). The division between virgins and vamps can be easily extended not only to all victims of sexual violence but also to all women, who are daily labelled in one way or another.

The double standard promotes the maintenance of a certain behaviour, from which a certain reputation derives, and in this sense, it is a form of disciplining female behaviour. In this context, practices related to image-based sexual abuse can no longer be considered a joke or a form of desire but must be seen as an attempt to re-establish forms of power that contribute to maintaining the domination of one gender over the other (see Giomi, Magaraggia 2017). Sexual violence and, by extension, image-based sexual abuse, ultimately have little to do with unrestrained desire and lust, but rather with the desire to put women back in their place and regulate their sexuality, punishing them for any action perceived as deviating from presumed normality.

1.6 Engaging in Sexting in a Non-Gender-Neutral Space

Once it is clear that image-based sexual abuse is a form of sexual and gender-based violence, it is important to remember another peculiarity, namely that it takes place entirely in the digital space. Technology is now part of daily life, so it is wrong to speak of the “online” world as a separate world from the real world; a common discourse in early internet studies, quickly challenged thanks to the research of various scholars who have shown how different cultures use the internet differently and therefore the online space is a medium that is adapted to one’s cultural practices (cf. Rogers 2009: 6). Therefore, what happens online is an extension and reflection of the “corporeal” reality, as evidenced by the consequences of image-based sexual abuse on the mental health of the victims (see 1.1). In fact, it is important to counter the narratives that deny the seriousness of forms of online violence as “not real:”

We have been told for a long time that the best way to deal with this sort of harrassment [sic] and violence is to laugh it off. Women and girls and queer people have been told that online misogynists pose

no real threat, even when they’re sharing intimate guides to how to destroy a woman’s self-esteem and force her into sexual submission. (Penny 2014: ¶ 27)

What happens online can have not only psychological but also physical effects on individuals or groups of people involved; this is demonstrated by the misogynistic attacks that have occurred in Canada and the United States discussed by Penny in her article (see 1.8). Like reality, therefore, the internet is not a “gender-neutral and ‘colorblind’” space (Eirken, Ingram 2021: 5), on the contrary, it can amplify and perpetuate social inequalities caused by power imbalances that already exist (cf. Kee 2015: 32), such as sexism, racism, and heteronormativity. This is not to question the potential of digital space, where unjust norms are often challenged and overturned. However, it is necessary to understand that social problems do not simply disappear by entering this space, as it is composed and created by the same people who make up and create society.

Sexting is a practical example of how social prejudices do not end when entering online spaces, which is also a useful example to analyze for its correlation to some practices of image-based sexual abuse. The term sexting (sex + texting) is used to describe emails, text messages, and other electronic forms of communication that contain sexual material, such as suggestive or provocative text, or images of nude, nearly nude, or sexually explicit individuals (cf. Ringrose et al 2013: 306). It is an activity that, if conducted with the consent of the parties involved, can be a valuable resource for experiencing relationships, and affection, and exploring one’s sexuality, and one’s body. However, when sexting is performed by minors, the tone of public discourse often turns to exaggerated alarmism that can be described as moral panic¹⁵ (see Hasinoff 2015, Mainardi 2015, Scarcelli 2020). Historically, there have been recurring episodes of this type, characterized by some features such as the fear that girls’ virtues were compromised or that they were out of control in the face of new technologies (cf. Mainardi 2015: 211). This is also true for sexting, often seen as a technological, legal, sexual, and moral crisis (cf. Hasinoff 2015: 1) that, while involving all adolescents, generates much more concern when it involves girls.

This approach reinforces the social norms discussed in 1.4 and 1.5, which construct female sexuality as something problematic, to be regulated and monitored:

The discourse that self-sexualising through sexting images puts girls at moral risk of exploitation works

¹⁵ Moral panic is a form of collective panic that is unjustified about an issue that is considered by many people to be a threat or danger, often caused by the media production of distorted and sensationalistic news.

[...] il sexting [è] stato molto spesso demonizzato, mentre allo stesso tempo si è cercato di dare alle ragazze strumenti e consigli per tutelarsi e difendersi: una pratica molto comune, che può ricadere in una forma di colpevolizzazione delle ragazze per il loro desiderio di esprimersi ed esprimere la loro sessualità.

(Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 25)

through age-old 'sexual double standards' that: position girls' sexuality as something innocent, pure and at risk of contamination through active desire (Griffin, 1985; Jackson and Cram, 2003; Tolman, 2012; Egan, 2013); and situate girls as morally responsible for protecting the virginal body from hard-wired aggressive male sexuality (Holland et al., 1998). (Ringrose et al. 2013: 307)

In this way, girls are denied sexual agency and the practice of sexting is seen as wrong in its entirety: public discourse discourages it, conveying the message that creating and sharing intimate images is inherently dangerous (cf. Hasinoff 2015: 3). Therefore, if the photos go beyond the private context in which they were initially sent (becoming image-based sexual abuse), the blame is placed on the victim because they shouldn't have taken them in the first place. Of course, sexting has its pitfalls, the same ones you face every time you choose to trust someone else: “[b]ut how can a person who chose to trust someone bear more of the blame than the person who deliberately chose to harm her?” (Hasinoff 2015: 3). Focusing on those who create the images rather than those who subsequently share them without consent obscures the actions of those who commit violence online, blaming the victims and sexting and forgetting the perpetrators (cf. Eirken, Ingram 2021: 4).

The research conducted by Ringrose et al. (2013) on a group of girls and boys between 13 and 15 years old showed that the same social dynamics also apply to those who engage in sexting. For boys, obtaining images is proof of their value and desirability, like a performance in which the one who possesses more material and more original (i.e., not already seen by others) is also more “masculine” (see 1.7). While for girls, receiving requests for images of their body is considered a compliment, as it means being desired; actually producing and sending them is a sign of sexual availability and lack of self-respect, in short, of being “easy.” In this way, teenage girls' intimate images can be used by peers to devalue and humiliate them, and at the same time, be a source of panic for adults.

Image-based sexual abuse is not an inevitable consequence of sexting, but it can still become one. In fact, material produced consensually through this practice can later be shared non-consensually. Ringrose et al. (2013) also came across sexually explicit images created through digital manipulation, which produced the same stigma on the victim but had no repercussions on the perpetrator. Finally, sexting

Tr. en.: “[...] sexting has often been demonized, while at the same time, efforts have been made to provide girls with tools and advice to protect themselves: a very common practice, which can lead to a form of blaming girls for their desire to express themselves and their sexuality.”

can become a coercive practice precisely because of social pressures, leading to acts of extortion (sextortion). In this way, analyzing the phenomenon of sexting allows us to understand how public opinion and social norms act towards image-based sexual abuse.

1.7 Boys Will Be Boys: Homosociality and Gender-Based Violence

The results of the studies presented in 1.3 have shown that the victims of image-based sexual abuse are mostly women; some of these studies also highlight another trend: most of the perpetrators are men (fig. 05). This data is consistent with what emerges from other cases of violence against women, but also with what is explained in 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6, namely that the foundations of gender violence can be traced back to the power disparity between men and women and the desire to preserve it, both obtained by trapping genders into normative roles. But in addition to these gender roles, which are more like expectations of behaviour in some societies, there is also a gender identity that is the continuous process by which meanings are attributed to the individual through social interactions: “[g]ender, in other words, is relational” (Birds 1996: 122). Therefore, to understand gender disparities, it is not enough to study the relationships between genders (cf. *ibid.*: 120), because there are peculiar dynamics and inequalities also within relationships between women and women and between men and men (*intra-gender*) that can influence interactions between men and women (*inter-gender*).

Homosociality is defined as the non-sexual attraction of an individual to members of the same sex (cf. Lipman-Blumen 1976: 16), thus including all non-sexual interactions that men have with other men. These interactions are many and varied throughout each person’s life, ranging from deep friendships to superficial acquaintances and occurring in different environments (from men’s clubs and military academies to locker rooms, workplaces, or bars), but are equally fundamental to the construction of male identity. Already in the 1980s, Hartmann emphasized the importance of male bonds in society by defining patriarchy¹⁹ as a set of social relationships that establish interdependence and solidarity among men, enabling them to dominate women.

¹⁹ Patriarchy is a social system in which men primarily hold power and dominate in roles of leadership, politics, moral authority, social privilege, and control of private property.

Who has shared non-consensually private sexual material – gender



These relationships are hierarchical for men themselves, who occupy different positions depending on their social class or ethnicity, but unite them in maintaining a power relationship with the female gender (cf. Hartmann 1981: 11).

In particular, Birds in his analysis of homosocial relationships (1996: 121-123) identified three shared values of masculinity that are reinforced through such interactions:

- ✦ *Emotional detachment*, is built through family relationships where boys develop their identity in relation to what they are not in comparison to their mothers; thus, expressing emotions is seen as revealing vulnerability while withholding them is seen as maintaining control.
- ✦ *Competitiveness*, is built and maintained through relationships among men where individuality becomes competitive; in this way, identity within a male group depends not on similarity and cooperation, but on separation and distinction, facilitating a hierarchy in relationships.
- ✦ *Sexual objectification of women* is built and maintained through relationships among men where male individuality is conceptualized not only as different but also as better than female individuality; thus, a symbolic distance is created with women that makes it easier to depersonalize their oppression.

The set of values listed contributes to outlining a clear norm of what it means to be male, called *hegemonic masculinity*, which is maintained because it enables men to be recognized as such by other men (Ferrero Camoletto, Bertone 2016: 48). This does not mean that there is only one type of masculinity, in fact, hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation not only to women but also to subordinate masculinities (Connell 1987: 185-186) or alternative masculinities.

Every man incorporates a set of values into their gen-

↑ Fig. 05 Perpetrators of image-based sexual abuse by gender in Eaton, Jacobs, and Ruvalcaba’s (2017) study.

der identity that may or may not be consistent with hegemonic masculinity: the very idea of masculinity is not a static concept and can be central to one's identity (internalized) or simply recognized by it (interiorized). However, any deviation from hegemonic masculinity is seen as a violation and therefore repressed in homosocial interactions, so these variations rarely lead to actual change in the gender order (see Birds 1996), because: “[o]ne whose masculinity conceptualization is nonhegemonic still understands himself as ‘not what ‘real’ men are supposed to be’ [...]” (Birds 1996: 127).

The values of hegemonic masculinity, therefore, essentially construct male identity in contrast to female identity: “[b]eing masculine, in other words, means being not-female” (ibid.: 127). However, as analyzed by Flood (2008), homosociality organizes men's relationships with women in at least four ways:

- ✦ Male-male friendships take precedence over male-female relationships, and platonic friendships with women are dangerously feminizing and rare, if not impossible.
- ✦ Sexual activity is fundamental to male status, and other men are the audience—always imagined and sometimes real—for each other's sexual activities.
- ✦ Heterosexual sex itself can be the means through which a male bond is established.
- ✦ The narration of sexual activity by men is shaped by male homosocial culture.

From what has been said, another characteristic of homosociality emerges: it is inherently heteronormative.¹⁷ In fact, some practices are considered potentially homosexualizing or feminizing (cf. Ferrero Camoletto, Bertone 2016: 51), such as having non-sexual relationships with women; a notion that, observed from the outside, contains irony, as it presents social contact with the female gender as a risk to male heterosexuality (cf. Flood 2008: 345). Furthermore, these dynamics once again favour the objectification of the feminine, subordinating it in various ways to the masculine, so for men, relationships with women become a field in which to demonstrate their power to themselves and others. This highlights the performative nature of homosocial interactions, where many actions and narratives are done for demonstrative purposes in order to confirm one's masculinity in front of other men and compete with them. In fact, according to

¹⁷ Heteronormativity is a normative worldview that aligns sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles and assumes that sexual and marital relationships between opposite sexes are the best or only way to live and relate.

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.[...] That is why Napoleon and Mussolini both insist so emphatically upon the inferiority of women, for if they were not inferior, they would cease to enlarge. [...]. For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgement, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and at dinner at least twice the size he really is?

(Woolf 1929: 31)

some analysts and researchers in the field of men's studies,¹⁸ men may attempt to improve their position in male social hierarchies only through the use of certain “markers of virility” (cf. Kimmel 1994: 129), such as sexual conquests.

The assumptions that apply to masculinity are so familiar that they are often taken for granted by both men and women, as demonstrated by commonly used expressions such as “boys will be boys”, meaning that males are males and will do male things. With the same naturalness, some image-based sexual abuse practices are downgraded as “not serious” rather than as sexual and gender violence. Instead, gender violence, especially in the form of collective harassment, sometimes serves to solidify homosocial relationships. This is demonstrated by several studies carried out on practices such as girl watching¹⁹ in Quinn's (2002) workplace, the *puttan tour*²⁰ of Italian boys in Crowhurst and Eldridge's (2018) study, or upskirting (see 1.1) in Hall, Hearn, and Lewis's (2021) research.

The first study is an analysis of why the same practice is seen by those who perpetrate it (men) as harmless fun or a normal interaction between genders, while by those who experience it (women) as harassment. The answer can be found in the lack of empathy that makes possible the objectification of women in order to construct male identity. In fact, the subjectivity of women is not taken into account because men: “[...] understand her primarily as an object, and objects do not object” (Quinn 2002: 398). This is even more evident when asked to imagine themselves as women, the interviewees did not feel comfortable defining girl watching as a game (cf. *ibid.*: 397).

The second study demonstrates that these harassments often take on a playful connotation, becoming a gendered form of entertainment and amusement. Therefore, the practice of the *puttan tour*, which effectively reproduces a structure of inequality and normalizes violence against sex workers,²¹ becomes constitutive of the bond between men.

The third study is particularly interesting because it analyzes a mode of non-consensual creation of private sexual images (upskirting) and demonstrates that homosocial interactions in the digital space have the same characteristics as those in the physical dimension. Indeed, the condition for which they can be practised is easily replicable online: an environment with an exclusively male presence. In this way, it is possible to create bonds between men even in forums, blogs, or social networks, through the usual dynamics of emotional detachment, competition, and objectification of women that lead to identical consequences. This is why all practices of

¹⁸ Men's studies is an interdisciplinary academic field dedicated to topics related to men, masculinity, gender, culture, politics, and sexuality, examining what it means to be a man in society.

¹⁹ Girl watching is a form of sexual harassment and refers to the act of men sexually evaluating women, often done in the company of other men.

²⁰ *Puttan tour* is a practice carried out by small groups of men in which they drive around with the intention of seeing, and sometimes conversing with or insulting, street sex workers.

²¹ “Sex worker” is a non-stigmatizing term for individuals who work in the sex industry, and it refers to any professional whose activity involves the exchange of money or goods for sexual services and/or performances.

image-based sexual abuse can be read through the dynamics of homosociality, which thus becomes a way to recognize oneself as a man and compete with other men, in order to gain their admiration and respect.

Before proceeding, it is important to remember that gender is a social, relational, and personal construct and that the characteristics of masculinity outlined here are common but not the only possible ones. Moreover, especially in a historical moment like this where certain popular rhetorics claim that masculinity is “in crisis” due not only to its alternative forms but also to gender equality battles that have led to women's emancipation, it becomes particularly important to develop readings that can interpret the potential of this transformation which should not be translated as loss or confusion – with the risk of provoking reactionary feelings of resentment – but as an opportunity to challenge stereotypical paths of identity construction and to seek new ones that are more free and shared (see Ciccone 2019).

1.8 Inside the Manosphere: Online Antifeminism

The crisis of masculinity, proposed by some types of popular rhetoric, is therefore due to real or perceived social changes, such as those achieved by feminist demands, which are sometimes read in an apocalyptic key, leading to extremely misogynistic views, which find expression mainly in digital spaces where it is possible for men to gather and pursue their own demands: “[h]omosociality thrives online” (Hall, Hearn, Lewis 2021: 4).

The collection of these blogs, forums, chats, Facebook groups, subreddits,²² YouTube channels is called the manosphere:

[...] a corner of the Internet that supports and amplifies different kinds of masculinities and men's rights, including anti-feminists, father's rights groups, ‘incels’ (involuntary celibates), androphiles (same-sex attracted men who don't identify as homosexual), paleomasculinists (who believe male domination is natural) and even more obscure fringe groups. (Bratich, Banet-Weiser 2019: 5008)

Despite the presence of several actors in this space, it is possible to identify some of the dominant rhetoric studied within it.

²² Subreddit are areas of interest on which the contents published on Reddit are organized. Reddit is a website for news, entertainment, and forums where users can post text or hyperlinked content.

First of all, there is that of the *men's rights activists* (MRAs), who are also called *masculinists* (see Vingelli 2019). In reality, this movement was born in the 1970s and, inspired by feminism, proposed the “liberation of men” through criticism of traditional values of masculinity and gender roles. However, an anti-feminist faction quickly formed within it that continued to promote a strictly conservative vision of gender roles (cf. Ging 2017: 639). Following the positive outcome of some feminist demands, MRAs began to outline a new type of gender discrimination: that against men who would be victims of an oppressive system. In this system, women—and in particular feminists—dominate society and men, activating a process that demonizes them (cf. Vingelli 2019: 222). In summary, the contemporary men's rights movement is a reaction to the declining social status of white cisgender²³ men and the emergence of feminism and multicultural activism as a political force and can be described as both anti-feminist and pro-men's rights (cf. Marwick, Caplan 2018: 546).

Another point of view comes from self-proclaimed *incels*, short for involuntary celibates, who, unlike MRAs, were born online. Incels blame women and men who are defined as *alphas*, the flesh-and-blood stereotype of hegemonic masculinity values: physically fit, uncaring, and generally not very intelligent, but successful both in life and with women, for their lack of sexual success. In this sense, incels reject some aspects of hegemonic masculinity by positioning themselves as alternative and subordinate forms of masculinity. However, it is difficult to believe these claims when their expressions of misogyny are so extreme and demonstrate a clear intention to claim dominance over women in the space they live in—the online space—just like forms of hegemonic masculinity. (cf. Ging 2017: 651).

Another rhetoric that unites all the inhabitants of the manosphere is summarized by the metaphor of the *red pill*, borrowed from the famous movie *The Matrix*. In the film, the protagonist is presented with a choice: take the blue pill and continue living in an illusion, or take the red pill and learn the harsh truth. Therefore, the philosophy of the red pill claims to awaken men by opening their eyes to the misandric reality created by feminism.

Finally, one of the most cherished political rhetoric in the manosphere is that of evolutionary psychology, which is based on genetic determinism to explain male and female behaviour in terms of sexual selection. However, manosphere groups stop at the most superficial interpretation of genetic determinism, recycling theories that always affirm the same misogynistic notions, namely that women are irratio-

²³ The term cisgender refers to people whose gender identity corresponds to the gender and biological sex assigned at birth.

²⁴ Hypergamy is a marriage custom according to which, in a stratified society, members of a certain social group choose their spouse from a higher social position group.

nal, hypergamous,²⁴ programmed to mate with alpha males, and in need of domination (cf. *ibid.*: 649).

In conclusion of this survey of the dominant rhetoric within the manosphere, it is important to note that:

While the manosphere is by no means an ideologically homogenous bloc [...] what is perhaps most striking is the way in which ostensibly contradictory masculine formulations – alpha, beta, jock, geek, straight, gay, Christian, and atheist – can coalesce around any number of contentious issues or flash point events when the common goal is to defeat feminism or keep women out of the space. (*ibid.*: 653)

In fact, all the points of view within the manosphere converge into a compact front when it comes to re-proposing a certain view of women, and this unity remains stable in cases where they want to fight against them and feminism. This happens through a series of actions identifiable as online harassment that are carried out for “punitive” and declaredly antifeminist purposes.

The violence, therefore, is not carried out by individual individuals who exhibit aberrant behaviour, on the contrary, as demonstrated by Marwick and Caplan's analysis (2018), there is a real network of online harassment. Thus, attacks on women—which mainly target queer, black, or expert women in traditionally male-dominated fields (video games, technology, etc.)—are often organized and carried out by multiple people and take different forms, such as image-based sexual abuse, such as the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material, the manipulation of an image for pornographic purposes or tribute (see 1.2), or those that orbit around it (doxxing and cyberstalking). Other times, attacks take the form of persistent public death or rape threats (see Marwick, Caplan 2018; Ging 2019). Essentially, we are facing a victimist view of men in today's society, in which **“[...] la violenza maschile viene presentata come la reazione dei più deboli a una vessazione subita”**²⁵ (Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 76); and, once again, it is the behaviour of women that justifies it.

Finally, a mistake to avoid when talking about the manosphere is to consider it yet another reality confined to the online world. Instead, it must be considered how these ideas often translate into concrete actions. Tragic examples of this are several massacres, such as the one committed by Marc Lépine at École Polytechnique in 1985, the 2009 George Sordini shooting in Pittsburgh, and most recently, the 2014 Isla Vista killings by Elliot Rodger. All these mass murderers acted

²⁵ Tr. en.: “[...] male violence is presented as the reaction of the weakest to a suffered harassment.”

Un concetto centrale nel discorso di questi gruppi è quindi l'apparente influenza del femminismo a livello internazionale e nazionale, che avrebbe permesso — attraverso l'approvazione di norme 'a favore delle donne' — di attivare un progetto ideologico di demonizzazione degli uomini, in particolare mariti e padri, per negare i loro diritti umani e modificare un ordine costituito naturale, improntato alla complementarità fra i sessi e alla collaborazione nella differenza.

(Vingelli 2019: 228)

Tr. en.: "Therefore, a central concept in the discourse of these groups is the apparent influence of feminism at the international and national level, which would have allowed - through the approval of norms 'in favor of women' - to activate an ideological project of demonization of men, in particular husbands and fathers, to deny their human rights and modify a natural established order, based on complementarity between the sexes and collaboration in difference."

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in the name of the same motivations, which summarizes a clear point of view:

Women owe men. Women, as a class, as a sex, owe men sex, love, attention, "adoration", in Rodger's words. We owe them respect and obedience, and our refusal to give it to them is to blame for their anger, their violence – *stupid sluts get what they deserve*. Most of all, there is an overpowering sense of rage and entitlement: the conviction that men have been denied a birthright of easy power. (Penny 2014: ¶ 6)

²⁶ DDL 753 proposes a series of modifications in family law following a narrative that claims men's rights are trampled upon in case of divorce. In practice, it involves a series of regressive laws that would hinder divorce, undermine children's rights, and privatize violence.

In any case, the rhetoric of MRAs is not only manifested in extreme and bloody acts, but also permeates everyday discourse and, worse yet, political messages and journalistic reports of certain publications, as demonstrated by Vingelli's analysis (2019). It is a structured narrative that relies on alleged scientific and statistical bases, and for this reason, has managed to make headway among the mainstream public and insinuate itself into the most reactionary fissures of right-wing politics. An example of this is the proposal of Senator Pillon's eponymous DDL²⁶ (i.e. "Disegno di Legge", the Italian term for "bill"): yet another warning of how what happens online rarely remains confined there.

1.9 Just Don't Take Those Kinds of Photos: Victim Blaming

In the previous sections, a theme that deserves to be explored in more depth emerges, namely that of victim blaming. The practice is called victim blaming, sometimes translated as “revictimization” or “secondary victimization” (see Giomi, Magaraggia 2017). Victim blaming occurs when a person who has been the victim of a crime or violent act is accused of having somehow facilitated and provoked it through their own attitude or actions. Such an accusation is particularly harmful to the victim's psychological well-being, as it may lead them to believe that it was their own behaviour that led to the crime (cf. Attrill-Smith et al. 2021: art. 3).

Historically, victim blaming has been a common response to many sexually-based crimes, for example, it occurs every time one questions how a rape victim was dressed, how much they had to drink, or if they initiated contact with their attacker. In their review of studies on victim blaming towards rape victims, Bruggen and Grubbs (2014) identified several common characteristics.

First of all, male rape victims are more blamed than women because many people expect them to be able to defend themselves. However, the most blamed are homosexual men, due to a series of homophobic prejudices including the belief that they may be attracted to their aggressor. On the other hand, women are attributed greater blame if they had shown too open or trusting attitudes, or had previously known their aggressor. In particular, marital rape is by far the one that is perceived less as violence.

Finally, the authors observed that people are more likely to blame the victim and minimize violence when they believe in traditional gender roles and false myths about rape. Their observations are consistent with the social dynamics clarified in the previous sections (especially in 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, and 1.7) and, once again, are concrete evidence of the persistence of prejudices and stereotypes in society.

Victim blaming has not only social but also psychological bases. In fact, some theories (see Attrill-Smith et al. 2021; Bruggen, Grubbs 2014) liken it to a defence mechanism aimed at making the observer believe that that particular violence cannot happen to them. This occurs due to two main *cognitive biases*:²⁷

²⁷ Cognitive biases are deviations from normality or rationality that people employ in evaluating facts or events, and therefore contribute to creating a subjective reality that leads to evaluation errors or lack of objectivity in judgment.

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- ✦ The *just world hypothesis* theory, according to which the observer believes that people deserve what they really get and therefore that: “[...] **bad things only happen to bad people**” (cf. Attrill-Smith et al. 2021: art. 3).
- ✦ The *defensive attribution hypothesis* theory, according to which the observer blames the person who is least like him or her, and for example, is the reason why men tend to blame women more if they are victims of male aggression: they identify more with the aggressor than with the victim.

Such mechanisms also come into play in cases of non-consensual sharing of private sexual images, as highlighted in Attrill-Smith et al.'s 2014 studies. Respondents were more likely to blame the victim when indirectly asked, demonstrating that victim blaming is—at least in part—an unconscious process. Moreover, they showed a tendency to blame victims more in cases where they themselves had produced and shared the material with the primary perpetrator, supporting the bias of the just world hypothesis.

Of course, victim blaming is not always and only a defence mechanism: on some people, social prejudices have a much stronger influence than the desire to believe that a certain crime cannot happen to them. The phenomenon occurs frequently, so much so that when discussing image-based sexual abuse, some measures proposed to counter it blame the victim. This is the case with advice such as “**avoid sending certain images.**” As reported by Fairbairn (2015), even Hunter Moore, the creator of one of the first websites dedicated to revenge porn, blamed the victims for what had happened, stating that they should not have shared their intimate images in the first place, adding: “[i]t's 2012, what did you expect?” (Hunter Moore in Fairbairn 2015: 245).

In a 2013 article, Franks responded to several statements made in another piece where the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material was primarily considered a matter of bad manners. Therefore, the advice given to avoid having one's intimate images distributed was not to take them in the first place, thus suggesting that the main responsibility lay with the victim, even in cases where the material was stolen from their devices. As a result, Franks reflects on the gender dimension of victim blaming in cases of image-based sexual abuse, which, in this sense, becomes one of the many ways in which female sexuality is disciplined and punished. For illustrative purposes, Franks suggests a more neutral scenario (identity theft) to explain the absurd logic of victim blaming:

Those who would prefer not to have their identity stolen should not own a credit card. [...] [M]ost people are in fact very promiscuous with their credit card numbers, giving them to waiters [...]. It would be ridiculous for them to expect that a waiter is only going to use their credit card for the limited purpose for which it was authorized; once they gave their consent for the card to be used in one context, they should expect that the waiter is going to use it anywhere he likes. (Franks 2013: ¶ 8)

²⁸ Tr. en.: “[d]on’t send private photos, they can become a blackmail, be more reserved.”

²⁹ Tr. en.: “[t]he media are considered a priority area of intervention even in the most advanced measures to combat gender-based violence.”

Concluding, victim blaming can be interpreted as a defence mechanism or it can be the result of more or less conscious social prejudices. However, the observer’s unawareness does not diminish the suffering and stigma faced by a victim forced to deal with this practice that, at least on a psychological level, must be considered as another form of violence.

Although with varying degrees of awareness, victim blaming is a narrative that is very often used by the Italian public opinion in cases of image-based sexual abuse. Just think of the words that Riccardo Fabbriconi (aka Blanco) said on the occasion of Safer Internet Day 2022, the day dedicated to raising awareness among young people about safe internet use: “[n]on mandate foto private, possono diventare un ricatto, siate più riservati”²⁸ (Blanco in Michielon 2022: ¶ 4). It is therefore evident the unconscious influence of victim blaming dynamics even on the well-intentioned advice of a young man called as a guest precisely because of his fame among young people, an example that shows more than others how Italian thinking is permeated by a certain type of rhetoric. That is why to understand image-based sexual abuse and victim blaming it is important to analyze the narrative proposed by the media, especially the press.

1.9.1 Narrative of the Italian Press

Giomi and Magaraggia wrote in 2017 that “[i] media sono considerati area di intervento prioritaria anche nelle più avanzate misure in materia di contrasto alla violenza di genere”²⁹ (chapter 2). Therefore, in their book they analyzed the media representations, both fictional and factual, of cases of intimate partner violence in Italy, demonstrating that even news media follow narrative patterns that are both familiar and dangerous.

For example, the perpetrator’s motives are often romanticized, framing the crime in a context of passion, love torment, and jealousy. Additionally, violence is usually attri-

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buted to a spontaneous loss of rationality (“moment of madness,” “in the grip of anger,” “under the influence of alcohol”) on the part of the perpetrator or to their mental (“was depressed”), physical (“was very ill”), or economic (“had lost their job”) problems (Giomi, Magaraggia 2017: chapter 2, section 1.2). Stories like these absolve the aggressor of responsibility, making violence seem like an extraordinary act:

Sensazionalizzare la violenza di genere rende il fenomeno singolo un evento atipico. Il carnefice diviene un povero pazzo che per amore incondizionato e in preda alla gelosia decide di togliere la vita alla sua compagna.³⁰ (Fonte 2021: ¶ 6)

On the other hand, the victim and her body are often described in terms that are not too subtly erotic. She is placed at the centre of the narrative, with a morbid focus on her life, appearance, character, and habits. In this way, the violence is transformed into an erotic spectacle, while the aggressor remains unknown and their role is minimized (see Giomi, Magaraggia).

In addition, violence against women is often described using passive verb forms. In this way, the perpetrator of the violence disappears entirely from the narrative and the victim becomes the subject. This is the case with phrases such as: “woman killed in her apartment,” “two girls were raped on the beach after a party,” or “her private videos were leaked.” This narrative is particularly dysfunctional and dangerous because it portrays gender-based violence as something “bad” that simply happens to women while eliminating those who actively perpetrate it.

In short, the tones of these news tend to be exaggerated and not only that but also:

Gli avvenimenti sono spesso raccontati non in maniera attenta e rispettosa delle vittime, eventualmente analizzandone le motivazioni strutturali, quanto piuttosto andando a fondo nei dettagli più intimi e cruenti, generando una vera e propria “pornografia del dolore”.³¹ (Vescio 2021: ¶ 9)

Within the crisis that journalism is experiencing, the sensationalization of others’ pain assumes a fundamental role, as it produces clickbait³² headlines that exploit personal tragedies for private or corporate profit (see Vescio, July 21, 2021).

Like all forms of sexual violence, image-based sexual abuse also falls into these narrative patterns. Many newspaper articles on the Tiziana Cantone case are an example of

³⁰ Tr. en.: “Sensationalizing gender-based violence makes the phenomenon appear as a singular and atypical event. The perpetrator becomes a poor madman who, out of unconditional love and jealousy, decides to take his partner’s life.”

³¹ Tr. en.: “The tones of these news tend to be exaggerated and not only that but the events are often told not in a careful and respectful manner towards the victims, eventually analyzing their structural motivations, but rather by going deep into the most intimate and gruesome details, generating a real ‘pornography of pain’.”

³² Clickbait refers to catchy and sensational headlines whose primary function is to attract the maximum number of users in order to generate online advertising revenue.

this. It was the first case in Italy to bring public attention to the phenomenon of non-consensual sharing of private sexual material, but only after the victim's suicide.

Searching for the case on various search engines, one of the first articles one comes across is the one written by Facci for *The Post*, which is interesting to analyze. In fact, immediately after the title, Tiziana Cantone, the victim, is presented as a girl with a “postura ‘aggressive’,”³³ “alta, magra ma non troppo”³⁴ and “un po’ pantera ma non volgare,”³⁵ basically “una donna che vuole piacere agli uomini e che non ha problemi a riuscirci”³⁶ (Facci 2016: ¶ 1, emphasis added). Apparently, therefore, the first information that the journalist deemed appropriate to provide was a description of the victim's physical appearance. He continues by writing that, perhaps convinced by her “specie di fidanzato quarantenne,”³⁷ “Tiziana accetta di fare sesso con altri (anche con due alla volta: la condizione è che a sceglierli sia lei)”³⁸ (ibid.: ¶ 2, emphasis added). An irrelevant detail but one that aims to entertain the reader by imagining a specific sexual scenario.

The journalist continues by recounting that, in the recordings of these sexual relationships, she “a dire ‘stai facendo un video? Bravo’, cioè la frase tormentone che la ucciderà”³⁹ (ibid, emphasis added). Here is the maximum de-responsibility of the perpetrators: it was the phrase she said that killed her. The responsibility is hers, not of those who shared her intimate videos, nor of those who contributed to making them go viral. Furthermore, Facci focuses on Tiziana Cantone's pain by describing her descent “in un inferno senza ritorno e che neppure la morte in queste ore potrà fermare”⁴⁰ (ibid.: ¶ 5); and then “Tiziana non può letteralmente più uscire di casa”⁴¹ (ibid.: ¶ 7). The spectacle of suffering captures the reader's attention because it leverages that mixture of repulsion and attraction that humans feel when faced with scenes of pain (cf. Vescio 2021: ¶ 18).

To identify certain patterns, it is not always necessary to read all the articles, often the headlines are enough. This is demonstrated by those reported in **fig. 06**, which are only some examples of significant headlines in Italian cases of particularly discussed image-based sexual abuse. One thing they have in common is certainly the tendency to use the imprecise term “revenge porn” when talking about the non-consensual sharing of private sexual images. However, three other tendencies also emerge:

✦ *to imagine sexual scenarios*, with phrases such as “sex tape” or “dirty movie;” this, in addition to being technically incorrect, gives a malicious and sexual character to

³³ Tr. en.: “aggressive posture.”

³⁴ Tr. en.: “tall, slim but not too much.”

³⁵ Tr. en.: “a bit like a panther but not vulgar.”

³⁶ Tr. en.: “a woman who wants to please men and has no problem doing so.”

³⁷ Tr. en.: “sort of forty-year-old boyfriend.”

³⁸ Tr. en.: “Tiziana agrees to have sex with others (even with two at a time: the condition is that she chooses them).”

³⁹ Tr. en.: “says, ‘Are you making a video? Well done,’ which is the catchphrase that will kill her.”

⁴⁰ Tr. en.: “into a hell without return, and not even death in these hours can stop it.”

⁴¹ Tr. en.: “Tiziana can literally no longer leave the house.”

→ **Fig. 06**
The headlines of some of the Italian online articles on image-based sexual abuse cases in recent years.

Revenge porn, parla l'arbitro Diana Di Meo dopo la denuncia choc: "Quei video..."

Guendalina Tavassi e i nuovi video hot: “Ce ne sono altri...”

Diana Di Meo, l'arbitro vittima di revenge porn: «Momenti terribili, da giorni sto chiusa in casa»

Dalia e il video a luci rosse da ragazzina. Cosenza sconvolta, chi le ha rovinato la vita

Shock nel calcio: l'arbitro Diana Di Meo vittima di revenge porn

Maestra licenziata per un video hard, il responsabile si pente: «Ho sbagliato, a mia figlia direi di non inviare foto a nessuno»

La maestra di Torino: «Quei video fatti girare quando stavamo ancora insieme. Mio fratello non mi parla più»

Civita castellana – Video a luci rosse in chat e “revenge porn”. Si cerca chi lo ha diffuso

L'arbitra di calcio Diana Di Meo vittima di revenge porn: “Non lo auguro a nessuno: provo a resistere”

Diana Di Meo, arbitro vittima di revenge porn: «Video rubati dal mio telefono, piango da due giorni»

Maestra d'asilo cacciata dopo video hard: condannate preside e mamma che diffuse le foto in chat

Guendalina Tavassi, colpita da hacker: video spinti divulgati – VIDEO

Guendalina Tavassi: “Ecco perchè avevo quei video hot nel telefono”

Video osè, Diana: "Li ho girati io". In Procura anche l'ex fidanzato

Video hot della ex su Whatsapp, alla sbarra anche un poliziotto e un calciatore

Torino, la maestra d'asilo finisce sul web con un video hard

Rimini. Video a luci rosse della ex Liceale: indagato per “revenge porn”

Cremona, pubblica per vendetta video hard di marito e amante. A processo per revenge porn

the narrative and transgressive traits to female sexuality, contributing to stigmatizing it;

- ✦ *to sensationalize the pain of others* (pornography of private pain), with images such as “**locked at home for days**” or “**my brother no longer talks to me,**” an exaggeration of real suffering that makes the victim appear excessive and exhibitionist, increasing the reader’s curiosity but also the distance;
- ✦ *to sensationalize and romanticize violence*, with expressions such as “**the shocking accusation**” or “**unprecedented statements,**” it distances it from the reader, portraying it as an extraordinary event that cannot happen to everyone.

The devices have one thing in common: they are superfluous. In fact, they do not serve to communicate the objective event or to provide information, but to leverage commonplaces and stereotypes in order to create mass gossip. Therefore, Italian journalism forgets to condemn crimes, understand their causes and explain their consequences to sell and entertain rather than inform (see Fonte January 26, 2021; Vescio July 21, 2021).

1.9.2 Perception of the Italian Public

Around April 20th, 2021, a video went viral in which Beppe Grillo defends his son Ciro, who was accused of rape. The opinions expressed by the comedian, with the aggressive and arrogant tones that characterize his communication style, are shared by many people: Grillo’s son and his friends are just boys behaving like boys (see 1.7) and the victim is not credible because she was drunk and waited eight days before reporting the rape—who would ever wait eight days to report a violent crime?—so she must be a liar looking for easy money. Such words reiterate a preconception that portrays male nature as violent and predatory: women should expect such violence and act accordingly, in other words, not “ask for it” with inappropriate behaviour.

The fact that these words were spoken by a public figure is even more serious. First of all, because he attempted to put pressure on the judiciary and an ongoing trial thanks to his political and media power (cf. Marciello 2021: ¶ 3). Secondly, because the impact of these words is greater than those of other people, therefore the magnitude of the secondary violence that acts on the victim is amplified. Finally,

Just ignore the trolls. Don’t share personal information. Go offline.
These mantras pervade discussion of digital communication and the abuse and harassment that occur online. Although often well meaning, these statements contain problematic assumptions about whose responsibility it is to prevent harassment and how seriously we take certain forms of abuse.

(Fairbairn 2015: 229)

because, always due to this resonance, the prejudices he promotes are more listened to and his person becomes a figure to identify with in order to believe that it is right to give him a voice.

Certo, Grillo è solo un esempio particolarmente appariscente delle opinioni sulle vittime di violenza sessuale di molti italiani. L'immagine-based sexual abuse è una di quelle forme di violenza su cui il dibattito pubblico è più regressivo, probabilmente perché se ne discute da meno tempo o perché, in quanto non è una violenza fisica viene, a torto, considerata poco dannosa.

Of course, Grillo is just a particularly striking example of the opinions about sexual violence victims shared by many Italians. Image-based sexual abuse is one of those forms of violence on which public debate is most regressive, probably because it has been discussed for a shorter time or because, as it is not physical violence, it is wrongly considered less harmful.

As can be seen from the collection of comments on social networks (fig. 07) related to news about the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material (because other practices are very rarely discussed in Italian newspapers), public debate essentially takes four types of reactions. The first and main one is victim blaming, with comments like “**who told her to make the video?**” or “**just don't send intimate photos or videos.**” The second is a sort of dark humour or macabre irony expressed by phrases like “**before expressing a judgment I would like to see all the evidence,**” which in this context emphasizes how the seriousness of this crime is not recognized. The third is the delegitimization of the victim and the crime, evident in comments like “**she would do anything to appear**” which suggests that the victim not only asked for it but did it on purpose to gain profit or visibility. The fourth, finally, is the extreme sexualization of the victim with comments like “**for me, she now has a rosy future in porn**” which once again ridicules the crime committed, to the point of suggesting monetizing it.

These are clearly not the only shades in which public debate is expressed. However, their mere presence suggests the need for a change in the way certain narratives are carried out in Italy.

→ Fig. 07
The comments of some readers on some Italian articles about cases of image-based sexual abuse in 2021.



1.10 The situation in Italy

After this review of the language used by the Italian press and public opinion regarding image-based sexual abuse, it's time to consider the data. As in international cases, these mainly focus on the non-consensual sharing of private sexual images, which is the most well-known practice. In this area, Italian investigations are very recent, so they offer a limited view of the phenomenon.

In any case, reference can be made to two main studies. The first is the one published by the Dipartimento della pubblica sicurezza del Ministero dell'interno⁴² (fig. 08). The study shows a 45% increase in illegal dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos from 2020 to 2021 (for a total of 2,392), of which in 73% of cases the victims were female.

The second one is from *Permesso Negato*, a non-profit association that provides technological and legal support to victims of non-consensual pornography. Their survey (fig. 09) mainly focused on Telegram channels and groups, which are widely used means for the distribution of private sexual material in Italy (see 2.2.3.2). Channels and groups have almost doubled from November 2020 to November 2021, going from 89 to 190.

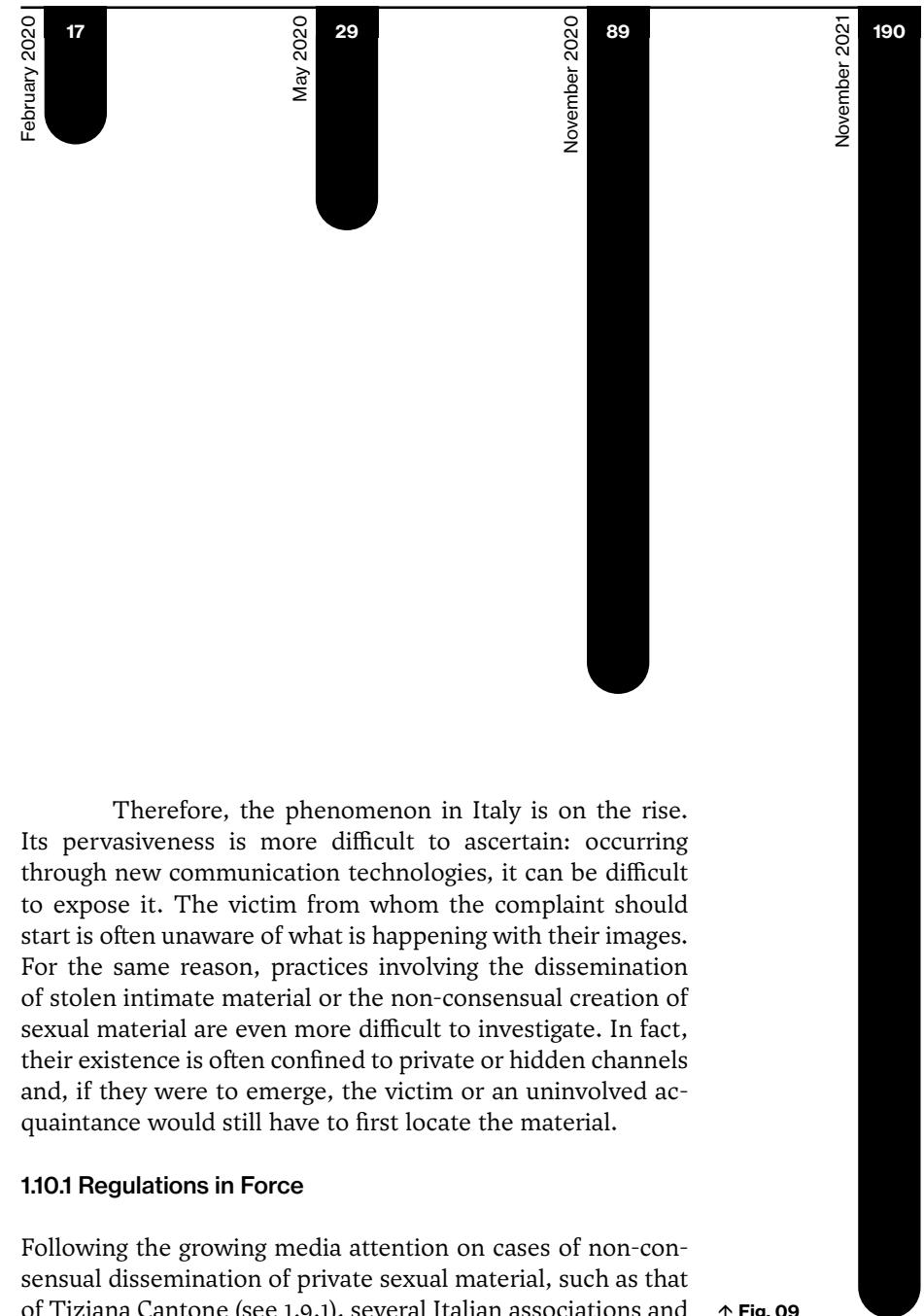
⁴² The Department of Public Security of the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for all activities related to the management of public order and safety in Italy.

↓ Fig. 08
The crimes of illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos reported to the police between 2020 and 2021.

January - October 2020
759

January - October 2021
1.099

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Therefore, the phenomenon in Italy is on the rise. Its pervasiveness is more difficult to ascertain: occurring through new communication technologies, it can be difficult to expose it. The victim from whom the complaint should start is often unaware of what is happening with their images. For the same reason, practices involving the dissemination of stolen intimate material or the non-consensual creation of sexual material are even more difficult to investigate. In fact, their existence is often confined to private or hidden channels and, if they were to emerge, the victim or an uninvolved acquaintance would still have to first locate the material.

1.10.1 Regulations in Force

Following the growing media attention on cases of non-consensual dissemination of private sexual material, such as that of Tiziana Cantone (see 1.9.1), several Italian associations and activists have pushed for the introduction and approval of a law against this crime.

On July 9, 2019, Article 612-ter (also known as the *Codice Rosso*) was introduced in the *Codice Penale* (Criminal Code) on the protection of victims of domestic and gender

↑ Fig. 09
The number of Telegram channels and groups where image-based sexual abuse is practised found between 2020 and 2021.

violence and the illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images or videos. The article reads:

[...] chiunque, dopo averli realizzati o sottratti, invia, consegna, cede, pubblica o diffonde immagini o video a contenuto sessualmente esplicito, destinati a rimanere privati, senza il consenso delle persone rappresentate, e' [sic] punito con la reclusione da uno a sei anni e con la multa da euro 5.000 a euro 15.000.⁴³ (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, Serie generale n. 173: art. 10)

⁴³ Tr. en.: "[...] anyone who, after creating or obtaining them, sends, delivers, transfers, publishes, or disseminates sexually explicit images or videos intended to remain private, without the consent of the persons depicted, shall be punished with imprisonment from one to six years and a fine from 5,000 to 15,000 euros."

It continues with several paragraphs, including:

La stessa pena si applica a chi, avendo ricevuto o comunque acquisito le immagini o i video di cui al primo comma, li invia, consegna, cede, pubblica o diffonde senza il consenso delle persone rappresentate al fine di recare loro nocumento.⁴⁴ (*ibid.*)

⁴⁴ Tr. en.: "The same penalty applies to anyone who, having received or otherwise acquired the images or videos referred to in the first paragraph, sends, delivers, transfers, publishes, or disseminates them without the consent of the persons depicted, with the intention of causing them harm."

And two other paragraphs prescribe increased penalties in cases where the crime is committed by a person who has or has had an emotional relationship with the victim, computer or telematic tools are used to perpetrate it, or especially when it is committed against a person in a condition of physical or mental inferiority or a pregnant woman.

1.10.2 Loopholes

The gaps in this law are evident, even just from the wording. Firstly, as defined in this document, image-based sexual abuse is reduced because it only covers one of the many equally violent and stigmatizing practices that can be committed against a person through the sharing and/or creation of private sexual material.

The shortcomings of this law are evident, even just from its wording. Firstly, as defined in this paper, image-based sexual abuse is reductive because it only covers one of the many equally violent and stigmatizing practices that can be committed against a person through the sharing and/or creation of private sexual material. Secondly, as emphasized by Caletti in his interview for *Salto.bz* (2019), the penalty is exemplary but inapplicable in most cases. In fact, the main article provides provisions for the prosecution of those who distribute sexually explicit images or videos *after having created or obtained them* without the consent of the persons represented. However, in reality, often the person who creates this

material is not the one who distributes it—think of the case of sexting (see 1.6)—who can thus be considered a secondary distributor. These individuals are only covered by the first paragraph, which establishes that the same penalty applies to those who share the material after receiving it, but only with the intention of causing harm to the represented person or persons. However, those who distribute the material they have received rarely do so intending to cause harm to those represented (see 1.1), and even if they did, it is difficult to prove in court.

Furthermore, the law fails to mention a series of useful tools to counter the phenomenon on multiple fronts and to limit the damage once the images have been disseminated, such as digital education in schools, psychological support for victims, removal of content from online platforms, and more (cf. Caletti in *unibzone* 2019: ¶ 10).

Lastly, another flaw in the text is the lack of consideration for minors. In fact, the non-consensual sharing of images of minors continues to be governed by the law against child pornography which does not cover cases where a minor shares a photo of a peer, which often happens in the context of IBSA, leaving a huge legislative gap (cf. Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 67-66).



Chapter 2

**Studying the
Online Vernacular
of Image-Based
Sexual Abuse**

The chapter describes the investigation carried out for the thesis, starting from the definition of the research area: the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse (2.1); it continues with a review of academic literature and expert investigations on both vernacular and image-based sexual abuse, and then analyzes the function of digital platforms within the phenomenon (2.2). Finally, research protocols developed to investigate various aspects of the vernacular of image-based sexual abuse on two platforms are presented (2.3). The chapter concludes with a summary of the most significant results (2.4).

2.1 Research Opportunities: Online Vernacular

After thoroughly discussing image-based sexual abuse, it is time to define the portion of the phenomenon that will be the subject of the thesis.

After thoroughly discussing image-based sexual abuse, it is time to define the portion of the phenomenon that will be the subject of the thesis. In deciding to study image-based sexual abuse, it may seem automatic to focus on the material that is distributed and/or created; however, this choice would be incorrect from several points of view. Firstly, as argued in Chapter 1, these images are used in an abusive manner towards those represented in them, so studying them would contribute to prolonging the violence. Secondly, using this material would actually constitute a crime in Italy, where the research was conducted: it would be a secondary distribution of sexually explicit images intended to remain private (see 1.10.1), and not only that: given the impossibility in some cases of being certain that the person depicted is of legal age, there would also be a risk of distributing child pornography. Finally, even if there were no ethical and legal aspects to consider, images provide mainly data on the victims and thus empirical information on the perpetrators; focusing on them is limiting because one never gets to study in more depth those who practice image-based sexual abuse.

So, is there a way to study image-based sexual abuse that starts from those who practice it? And what is it?

There are probably several opportunities, but this research has focused on studying the online vernacular language, which is a set of expressions, styles, and particular grammars specific to each online community.

IBSA, in fact, is a phenomenon that spreads through sharing. For example, it would be virtually impossible to know about the practices of non-consensual creation if the product did not come out of the devices of its creators. Distribution cannot occur without communication—no matter how concise, obscure, or hidden—and it tends to take place in certain online spaces that allow for exchange and communication, such as social media, forums, or messaging services, which can be defined as digital platforms.

Digital platforms have particular rules and ways of using that influence the user's behaviour within them (see 2.2.3). Therefore, each one ends up having its own unique combination of styles, grammars, and logics which, along

with mediated practices and communicative habits of users, can be defined as platform vernacular, i.e. a genre of popular communication where popular means “of the people” (cf. Gibbs et al. 2015: 259). Although some platform features are not unique, such as hashtags that are commonly used by many social networks and messaging services, each platform has its specific vernacular that has developed over time and has been influenced by the platform’s design, appropriation, and usage (cf. Gibbs et al. 2015: 259).

The vernacular is essentially the linguistic form that a particular group of people—often a community—naturally uses especially in informal situations: “[...] **it's the everyday stuff we say and do**” (Robert Glenn Howards in Owens 2013: ¶ 9). Therefore, vernacular expressions are inherently hybrid, “[...] **handily blurring the lines between structure and play, formal and folk, commercial and populist**” (Phillips, Milner 2017: 26).

Image-based sexual abuse is mainly carried out in closed online communities—or at least those that are hardly taken into consideration by users who are not interested in these practices—and which can guarantee, in various ways, certain protection of privacy. It goes without saying that each of these communities has developed a unique vernacular different from others, which is used by those who commit IBSA. Therefore, it is evident that the communications of users in such communities are one of those aspects of the phenomenon that can be analyzed by focusing on those who practice it. In fact, what perpetrators write can tell us about their preferences, actions, and motivations, while the way they write—the vernacular—highlights their perception of IBSA and the people at the centre of such practices.

The research questions at the heart of the thesis start precisely from the intent of analyzing IBSA through the language with which it is practised, therefore the first one is: **how and on which digital platforms image-based sexual abuse is practised?**

The answer prompts the formulation of questions capable of guiding the investigation: **what are the characteristics of the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse on the selected platforms?**

But also: **what are the characteristics of image-based sexual abuse that emerge from communications between users?**

2.2 State of Research

To answer the first question—how and in which digital platforms image-based sexual abuse is practised—and have a solid foundation to begin the research, it is important to conduct a literature review of existing studies in the areas of online vernacular and image-based sexual abuse. This will allow for a more careful delineation of the research path and define project objectives by identifying gaps in existing investigations that present an opportunity to fill them at least in part.

2.2.1 Online Vernacular

In 2019, Tuters began his analysis of the online vernacular of the far-right starting from the board /pol/⁴⁵ on 4chan (see 2.2.3.1), an analysis that was then continued in the following years with various collaborators. His research starts from the premise that:

The rise of social media platforms that have corporatized the experience of the web has led these otherwise disparate and marginal niches of what I call the *deep vernacular web* to see themselves as an oppositional subculture tasked with keeping alive what they perceive to be the original spirit of the web. (Tuters 2019: 39)

So, the vernacular of fringe platforms, such as 4chan, develops thanks to the antagonism with other platforms and acts as a gatekeeper⁴⁶ for their users. It is, in fact, important for members of less mainstream communities to recognize themselves and be recognized, and language is therefore highly significant as an indicator of belonging or not belonging to a certain group.

Continuing with the analysis of /pol/, Peeters, Willaert, and Tuters in 2020 demonstrated that the far-right vernacular born on 4chan - a fringe platform - rarely stays within its confines. In fact, similar to the ideologies of the manosphere, often discussed on 4chan as mentioned in 1.8, the /pol/ vernacular echoes until it finds a place on more mainstream far-right platforms. For instance, the researchers found many of the terms originating on /pol/ within the “comment” sections of articles published on Breitbart News - a news site founded by American conservative journalist Andrew Breitbart that played a fundamental role in the 2016 US presidential elections - demonstrating the ease with which vernacular

⁴⁵ /pol/ is short for politically incorrect and is a 4chan imageboard focused on political discussion known for its racist, white supremacist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic, and anti-LGBTQ+ content.

⁴⁶ Gatekeeping is the activity of controlling, and usually limiting, general access to something.

[...] the control individuals have over their media consumption can lead them into digital enclaves that actually reduce the need to be tolerant. [...] things that seem absurd to most people don't seem so absurd when a group of people have found each other from across the globe and formed an online community based on common beliefs that are pretty rare.

(Robert Glenn Howard in Owens 2013: ¶ 21)

2. Studying the Online Vernacular of Image-Based Sexual Abuse

can infiltrate from a fringe to a mainstream platform if users share certain views.

In a 2021 study, Peeters et al. analyzed how far-right vernacular is constructed online. According to the authors, the process involves the interaction of various aspects, including platform characteristics and the joke and game mechanisms specific to communities on 4chan and, in particular, /pol/:

Playing ironic and irresponsible games with language is also a longstanding feature of vernacular Internet communities, who imagine themselves as inhabiting regions of the web that exist outside of normal, real life. (Peeters et al. 2021: 1)

Therefore, the vernacular on /pol/ is created through language games that, on one hand, invent and canonize neologisms and, on the other hand, transform the meaning of existing terms. Ironizing on serious or offensive issues is commonplace on the internet, especially in certain spaces. However, as Phillips and Milner argue in their 2017 book, it cannot be considered exclusively positive or negative behaviour. In fact, certain behaviours are often positive for those who participate, as they can contribute to world-building and the strengthening of community identity or simply be entertaining, while they can be negative for outsiders, who may find them alienating, antagonizing, disturbing, or simply annoying (cf. Whitney Phillips and Ryan M. Milner in Jenkins 2017: ¶ 6):

[...] just as one person's weird is another person's Tuesday, one community's obscenity is another community's everyday expression; even the most seemingly dirty, inappropriate, or just plain weird traditions serve a specific social purpose within the communities that embrace them. (Phillips, Milner 2017: 26)

The online vernacular reflects the ambivalence that Phillips and Milner consider intrinsic to any online content because in most cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the real intentions of the interlocutors. In their analysis, the concept of ambivalence, i.e., the impossibility of judging whether something is entirely negative or entirely positive, is applied not only to the contents but also to those who create them and those who see them. In this way, it is emphasized that even the judgment of those who observe certain practices or communities from the outside is ambivalent because it is influenced by a series of biases derived from belonging to other

communities. However, it should be noted that sometimes it is wrong to apply the concept of ambivalence to those who observe the phenomenon, as in the case of the research on image-based sexual abuse conducted for the thesis. In fact, although it is true that within the communities in which these practices are carried out, they are seen as entertainment and sometimes as a correct form of social justice, there is nothing ambivalent about them: they are incorrect, violent, denigrating, and sometimes illegal, and they must remain so for anyone observing them from the outside.

To conclude the literature review on online vernacular, two studies can be cited that focus on the visual aspect, considering images and videos as an important part of online communication. For example, the analysis conducted by Pearce et al. (2019) within the framework of DMI³⁷ has shown how the visual vernacular of climate change changes depending on the digital platform, ranging from depicting abstract visions (Google Images) to characters who advance public and political discourse (Twitter), from aesthetically pleasing travel images or memes (Instagram), to scientific graphs (Wikipedia). The second example of visual vernacular analysis is the study in which Bogers et al. (2020) investigated bias in online representation of pregnancy. Their results have shown that, although visual language varies depending on the platforms, ranging from more serious narratives to ironic ones, the set of depictions focuses in any case on heterosexual, white, able-bodied, and middle-class women, excluding any other form of parent from representation.

As previously mentioned, studying the visual vernacular of image-based sexual abuse is impossible without in some way becoming complicit in the same form of violence. Therefore, the thesis aims to analyze the online vernacular of IBSA, especially following the studies carried out on the far-right language used on /pol/. As will be seen, the communities in which IBSA is perpetrated are equally fringe, and the way in which language is created (neologism or transformation of meaning) is similar. Therefore, the research objective is to expand knowledge of the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse by studying it within the communities in which it is practiced.

2.2.2 Image-Based Sexual Abuse

Image-based sexual abuse has never been studied in its entirety, rather research has focused on some of its practices. Certainly, the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material, both in academic and non-academic contexts, is the one that has received the most attention.

To begin the literature review on image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), one cannot fail to mention the investigation conducted by Kristof in 2020 which, although not academic in nature, was the initial inspiration for this thesis and also caused a scandal that involved the world's largest pornography platform. In fact, in the article summarizing his investigation—“The Children of Pornhub”—Kristof recounted how it is not only possible but also relatively easy, to find and watch videos containing various types of abuse on Pornhub. These include videos of rape, child abuse, and sexual exploitation, as well as non-consensually distributed private sexual videos: the only certain variable is the constant profit that the platform derives from their viewing. The material is difficult to remove due to two characteristics of Pornhub. Firstly, the platform generally does not take responsibility for users' actions; furthermore, users have the ability to upload and download videos without any kind of control. Although Kristof never mentions it, these videos can easily be framed within image-based sexual abuse as they are produced or shared non-consensually (see 1.1), so his article contributes to understanding the violence and pervasiveness of IBSA, whose material frequently moves from more niche channels to mainstream ones.

Many of the academic studies consulted—already mentioned in 1.3—consisted of a series of research investigating victims of non-consensual sharing of private sexual material and demonstrating that the majority of them are women. However, it is useful to mention again the research conducted by Hall and Hearn in 2018 on the website MyEx.com. In fact, their analysis took place directly on the digital platform and also involved comments attached to non-consensually distributed intimate images. In this way, researchers were able to identify different types of discourse that justify and/or motivate action for heterosexual or homosexual men and women, highlighting that in most cases the perpetrators were heterosexual men who claimed to be carrying out a “reckoning” against a woman who had degraded their masculinity and power. Another study worth mentioning again is the one conducted by Hall, Hearn, and Lewis in 2021 on upskirting. The research, in addition to addressing one of the much less discussed practices of non-consensual

image creation, also studied some mechanisms of online homosociality. In fact, online communications between producers and consumers of these shots (all men) have highlighted how this activity is considered a technical and artistic gesture, so the conversation in online spaces dedicated to upskirting often mutual tones of craftsmanship, involving an exchange of advice and guidelines on how and where to get the best images.

Another important study is the one conducted by Massanari (2017) on Gamergate, a case of structured and misogynistic harassment directed towards female professionals in the video game industry, and the Fapping, a case of non-consensual sharing of private sexual material of celebrities stolen from their accounts, both originating on 4chan and then spilling over to Reddit. By studying their structural characteristics—algorithms and governance⁴⁸—the researcher argued how some platforms support the existence of toxic technological cultures, making it possible to practice offensive and violent acts with impunity (see 2.2.3).

In Italy, on the other hand, the press has conducted various investigations on the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material. It's worth mentioning two main ones, one conducted by Zorloni in 2018 and the other by Fontana in 2020, both for *Wired*. Both focused on the Telegram platform, as it provides a series of useful tools to carry out this practice, and highlighted the pervasiveness of the phenomenon in the Italian context, showing its violence through the words of those who commit it.

Finally, it's time to mention the investigation that played the most central role in identifying the questions, method, and research objectives of this thesis, namely the one conducted by Bainotti and Semenzin and published in an academic article in 2020 and a book in 2021. The two researchers infiltrated various private Telegram groups known for the non-consensual sharing of private sexual material, demonstrating how some structures and features of the platform itself facilitate this type of practice (see 2.2.3.2). In addition, they categorized different types of users according to their interactions in the groups, also highlighting the playful environment that is created within them. Subsequently, they observed that non-consensual sharing is associated with subject categorization practices, sometimes even through the creation of online archives. Finally, they emphasized the impossibility, due to Telegram's characteristics, of complete removal not only of the material but also of the communities in which it is shared.

From the overview of these studies, it emerges that

⁴⁸ Governance is the set of principles, rules, and procedures that concern the management of a company, institution, or, in this case, a platform.

many forms of IBSA are not well-known and even less explored. That's why one of the goals of the thesis and the project is to provide a broader understanding of the practices that are carried out and the language that is used, increasing knowledge about the phenomenon and helping to define those forms of IBSA that are still unknown. Another goal is not to focus exclusively on victimization, as many of the mentioned studies have done, but to focus attention on perpetrators, studying what can be deduced about image-based sexual abuse through the form of their interactions. Finally, the aim is to contextualize the communities where image-based sexual abuse takes place, highlighting their characteristics.

2.2.3 The Choice of Platforms

In the previous sections, specific features of platforms that can guide and influence user behaviour have been discussed, and their name is affordances:

Like all technologies, digital technologies are replete with specific affordances, a term meaning – most simply – what an object allows a person to do with it (Gaver 1991). Although these affordances don't dictate behavior, they certainly limit one's options; you can't, for example, very easily use a child's car seat to mail in your taxes or burn down your house. (Phillips, Milner 2017: 45)

The affordances can be infinite and unique for each platform, however, there are some, described by Phillips and Milner (2017), that more or less all digital spaces share:

- ✦ *modularity*, which is the ability to manipulate, reorganize and/or replace parts of a set without interrupting or destroying its overall structure;
- ✦ *archivability*, which is the ease with which online content can be replicated and stored;
- ✦ *accessibility*, which is the ease with which stored content can be found through search thanks to categorization.

The listed affordances are essential for the implementation of IBSA and contribute to making it a pervasive phenomenon: for example, archivability makes it possible to save the material that is distributed, making it difficult to completely remove it from circulation.

Tuttavia, le affordance che contribuiscono maggiormente The affordances that contribute the most to the practice of image-based sexual abuse, typical of some social platforms, however, are anonymity or pseudo-anonymity that allow users to not expose themselves with their personal data and to communicate more uninhibitedly, but also require the creation of a recognizable community identity. These affordances not only can facilitate the perpetration of IBSA but also contribute to the creation of a specific vernacular. In fact, they prioritize certain forms of social exchange, delimiting certain modes of expression and action. In this sense, the vernacular is created through continuous user-user and user-platform interactions (see Gibbs et al 2015).

For the analysis of the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse carried out in the thesis, two digital platforms, 4chan and Telegram, were chosen, which have affordances that allow users to create and maintain a certain type of community in which it is possible to practice IBSA.

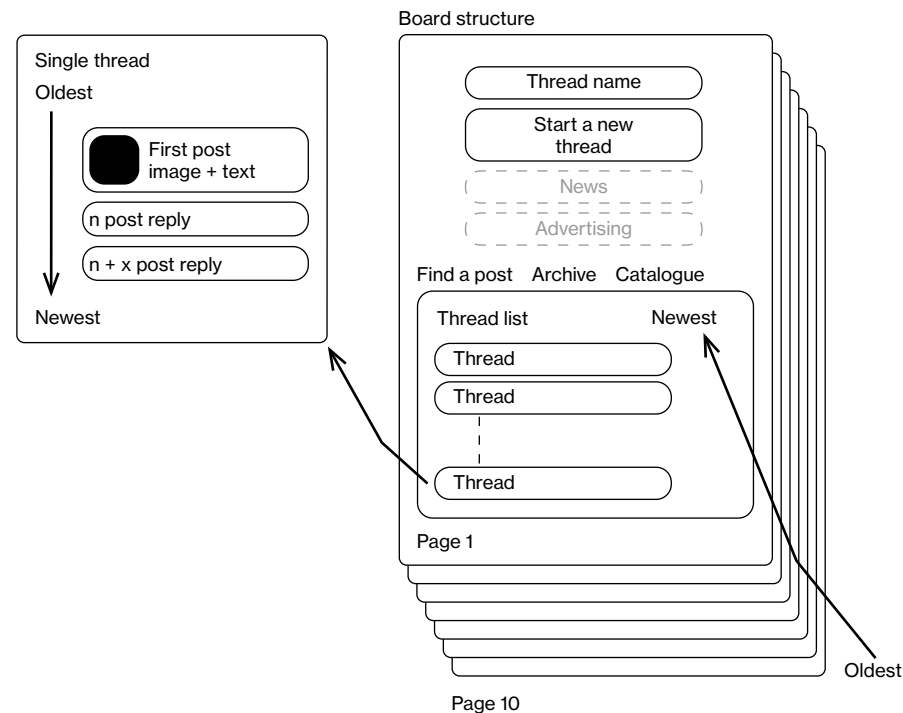
2.2.3.1 4chan

4chan is a website created in 2004 by Christopher Poole as an online discussion board (or forum) about Japanese anime,⁴⁹ which over the years has expanded to include sixty boards on various topics.

4chan is made up of boards, threads, and posts. Each board has a theme, for example, /pol/ (see 2.2.1) is “politically incorrect.” Like most discussion forums, 4chan groups post into threads (fig. 10). Therefore, to start a discussion, a user must post a post that starts a thread. The first post must include an image, which is not necessary for response posts. Threads are organized into pages, each displaying a preview of fifteen threads with their original post and a sample of replies, but users can click to read the entire thread.

The maximum total number of pages for each board is ten, and each thread is moved down one position when a new one is opened, but every time a user interacts with it, it is brought back to the top. It is possible to have an overview of the active threads in the “archive” section, present on each board. Threads that reach the bottom of the tenth page are considered “expired” and moved to the “catalogue” section of the board, where they can be consulted for another three days but without the possibility of interaction. Once the three days have passed, they are permanently removed and their URL redirects to an error page. Therefore, the contents of 4chan can be considered ephemeral, a specific affordance of the platform.

Another key affordance of 4chan is anonymity. In



⁴⁹ The term anime, in the West, is used to refer to Japanese-produced animated works.

fact, unlike other sites that offer pseudo-anonymity or the option of not using one's name or identity, on 4chan every post is published by default with the name “Anonymous.” Users can indicate another name, but since there are no accounts on the platform, this information must be given on a post-by-post basis. Therefore, even if someone were to use a username or pseudonym, nothing would prevent someone else from posting under the same name, making it impossible to assign an identity to users.

In 2014, Bernstein et al. conducted a study on how these two affordances influence user behaviour on the /b/ (random) board. They found that anonymity made it imperative to strengthen the sense of community through language, which is why a specific vernacular often develops in many 4chan threads, mastery of which influences the credibility of those posting content. Moreover, anonymity can lead users to exhibit more uninhibited behaviour:

[...] styling the collective as “Anonymous” also suggests de-individuation and mob behavior. It may be safe for /b/ posters to act in a way they never would do offline because they can be relatively certain that their actions will not come back to haunt them.

↑ Fig. 10 Structure of a 4chan board.

(Bernstein et al. 2014: 51)

On the other hand, even though it may seem counterintuitive, ephemerality increases participation in the community: if users want to avoid a thread from expiring, they must keep the conversation going. Furthermore, this transience speeds up the evolution of written and visual language, as the same content is often reposted and potentially remixed (see Bernstein et al. 2014).

Another affordance that makes 4chan a particularly free space is the lack of regulation on the posted content, which is poorly controlled even if it were to violate the site's rules. In fact, the platform is also famous for being the first place where images and videos related to the phenomenon called Fapping were shared. This fact is obviously in conflict with 4chan's first rule, which states: “[y]ou will not upload, post, discuss, request, or link to anything that violates local or United States law” (4chan, rules, global rules, 1), however, the material was removed only after several weeks thanks to the intervention of Poole.

These affordances clearly favour the creation of communities in which image-based sexual abuse can be practised, given that users are not only protected by anonymity but also find a safe space to pursue their “interests” with others. In this thesis, we chose to analyze a particular board on 4chan that has never been studied before, namely /r/, or “Adult Requests.” Like the rest of the platform, English is used on /r/, and it is among the boards labelled NSFW—Not Safe For Work—where explicit, obscene, violent, or potentially controversial material can be found that is best not viewed in public. Specifically, on /r/, threads can be opened with requests for sexually explicit material, such as the tracking down of a specific pornographic video, the publication of images similar to an example image, or the creation of sexually explicit images through photo manipulation. The practice of non-consensual creation of sexual material is continually carried out in this public space, making it imperative to study its contents to better understand the phenomenon.

2.2.3.2 Telegram

Telegram is an instant messaging and broadcasting⁵⁰ platform, based on the cloud, created by Pavel and Nikolai Durov in 2013 as an alternative to similar services such as WhatsApp and Messenger, which provided greater protection of user privacy.

Telegram, which is a non-profit and primarily financed by Pavel Durov, positions itself very differently from the

⁵⁰ Broadcasting, in telecommunications, is the transmission of information from a single transmitting system to a group of receiving systems.

Le piattaforme digitali non sono luoghi neutrali e, anzi, ogni algoritmo che ne costituisce l'essenza si lega profondamente ai valori, alle idee e alla visione del mondo dei suoi creatori.

(Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 85)

Tr. en.: “Digital platforms are not neutral spaces, and in fact, every algorithm that constitutes their essence is deeply tied to the values, ideas, and worldview of their creators.”

digital capitalism of big platforms, which are known for revenue from massive advertising and the collection and sale of user data.

Telegram's stance on privacy is clearly stated in its FAQ, where it declares its intention to protect users' private conversations from the curiosity of third parties such as government officials or employers, and their personal data from third parties such as vendors or advertisers. Firstly, as stated in Telegram's Privacy Policy, user data is only stored if necessary for the platform's operation. Secondly, Telegram's conversations—both messages and voice calls—are encrypted, and even cloud-based chats, where messages and shared media are saved and stored for future access, are stored on Telegram's own encrypted cloud rather than locally on the device. This provides greater security because the encrypted material is saved on an encrypted cloud and not on other clouds, as is the case with traditional apps such as WhatsApp, whose backups are created without encryption and can be read by anyone. Finally, to use Telegram, it is only necessary to enter one's phone number, but it is never mandatory to enter information that identifies one's real identity: a username is sufficient. Telegram, which is non-profit and primarily funded by Pavel Durov, positions itself very differently from the digital capitalism of large platforms, which are known for revenue from massive advertising and user data collection and sale.

Telegram offers several tools for its users and it's worth taking a look at the main ones:

- ✦ *Classic chats*, which have already been mentioned; they are cloud-based and adopt client-server encryption (that is, they are encrypted from the device to the Telegram servers and vice versa); they allow the sending of text, voice or video messages, the current GPS location or coordinates on a map, contacts, and any type of file up to a maximum size of 2.0 GB.
- ✦ *Secret chats*, which are a chat mode that can be set by the user to start a conversation. Here messages are end-to-end encrypted, i.e., between the two devices involved in the conversation, which is why they cannot be saved on servers; consequently, the conversation cannot be synchronized on multiple devices. In addition, messages are not saved on the cloud, which means that once the platform is closed, they cannot be retrieved. Moreover, this mode offers the possibility to set a self-destruct timer on shared content, so messages or media sent with it are

destroyed after a while at the sender's discretion, ranging from one second to one week. Furthermore, in case the recipient takes a screenshot of this content, the platform notifies the sender.

- ✦ *Groups* can contain up to 200,000 members. The creator can set themselves and/or other administrators with selectable permissions (e.g. changing group info, blocking/restricting users, or adding administrators) and user permissions can also be modified (e.g. sending messages, media, stickers or GIFs, adding members or pinning messages). Groups are private—they do not appear to non-members through search and can only be accessed through an invitation—but they can be made public by setting a group username; this way they can be found through search and anyone can read the messages exchanged.
- ✦ *Channels* are chats where any administrator can send messages that all subscribers receive, and they can only comment if the channel is associated with a group of which they are members. Channels have no maximum limit of subscribers and can be either public or private. Public channels can be found using the search function, and anyone can view the shared content, while private channels can only be accessed via invitation links.
- ✦ *Bots*, which are small programs within Telegram that offer multiple functionalities with immediate and fully automated responses. They can be created by any third-party developer using the Bot API⁵¹ of Telegram.

Among other features offered by Telegram, there is the possibility to verify your account if you meet some minimum requirements, to start voice chats, to use stickers, to create polls, or to import chat history.

The privacy protection of Telegram is an admirable feature, but it provides a sense of security to users that has made it a space suitable for sharing illicit, violent, and extremist content. If this feature is combined with the listed tools — especially groups and channels, which, with their high number of possible participants, become similar to a social network — it is not surprising that Telegram is widely used for the dissemination of conversations from jihadist or far-right terrorist channels (cf. Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 86-87).

Bainotti and Semenzin (2020; 2021) have studied how these affordances, combined with poor content moderation,

⁵¹ In computer science, the term API (Application Programming Interface) refers to a set of procedures aimed at completing a specific task, such as the software libraries of a programming language.

make it practically impossible to stop the proliferation of image-based sexual abuse on Telegram. In fact, the platform states that all content within chats, channels, and groups is private territory for those who participate: users can report content, groups, channels, or other users they consider dangerous, but there is no certainty that these reports will be taken into account. For example, if a user were reported for inappropriate or unwanted messages, Telegram would “limit” the account, meaning the user would be prevented from starting conversations with people who have not saved them as contacts pending further evaluation, but the rest of their activity would remain unchanged. Instead, channels and groups where the non-consensual distribution of private sexual material occurs are sometimes actually closed, both because, in theory, Telegram does not allow the sharing of pornography, and because in many of these cases, pedophilic material is often spread as well. However, the solution is far from definitive because the same channels and groups are immediately reopened by administrators who, thanks to the platform's affordances, have backup channels available for previously collected material (see Bainotti, Semenzin 2021). In this way: “[...] **Telegram prende forma come un luogo in cui pratiche misogine diventano dei modi per essere maschi insieme, all'interno di un gruppo.**”⁵² (Bainotti, Semenzin 2021: 83), replicating those mechanisms of homosociality discussed in 1.7.

⁵² Tr. en.: “[...] Telegram takes shape as a place where misogynistic practices become ways to be men together, within a group.”

Due to their size, specific practices conducted within them, and the homosocial mechanisms put in place, even pornographic Telegram groups are places with a strong sense of community where it is important to communicate using a specific language. The research in this thesis focuses on the Italian pornographic subculture on Telegram and some of the groups that comprise it. Spaces in which exchanges and conversations about legal and consensual pornography are conducted alongside a variety of IBSA practices, blurring the boundaries.

Digital methods are research strategies for dealing with the ephemeral and unstable nature of online data.

(Rogers 2019: cap. 1)

2.3 Research Protocols on 4chan and Telegram

To conduct the study on the vernacular of image-based sexual abuse on 4chan and Telegram and to answer the second and third research questions, we chose to use Digital Methods, that is, techniques for studying social changes and cultural conditions through online data (cf. Rogers 2019: chapter 1). Digital Methods are research strategies for addressing the unstable and ephemeral nature of online data (cf. Rogers 2019: chapter 1). In fact, the digital world presents a series of objects that can be considered “**natively digital**” (Rogers 2013: 1) the so-called “digital objects”, that is, online elements consisting of data and metadata, for example, hyperlinks, tags, likes, but also Instagram profiles, 4chan threads, Telegram chats, and other specific digital objects, which often also constitute part of a platform’s affordances. Therefore, Digital Methods use the digital objects available online to try to learn from the way they are treated by the methods integrated into dominant online devices (see Rogers 2013, 2019).

Therefore, Digital Methods are a set of methodologies for conducting sociocultural research online that, unlike those already known to social, computer, or human sciences for analyzing content, start from the use of specific features incorporated in online tools. They are particularly suitable for conducting research on the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse, especially considering the subcultural nature of the spaces in which it occurs.

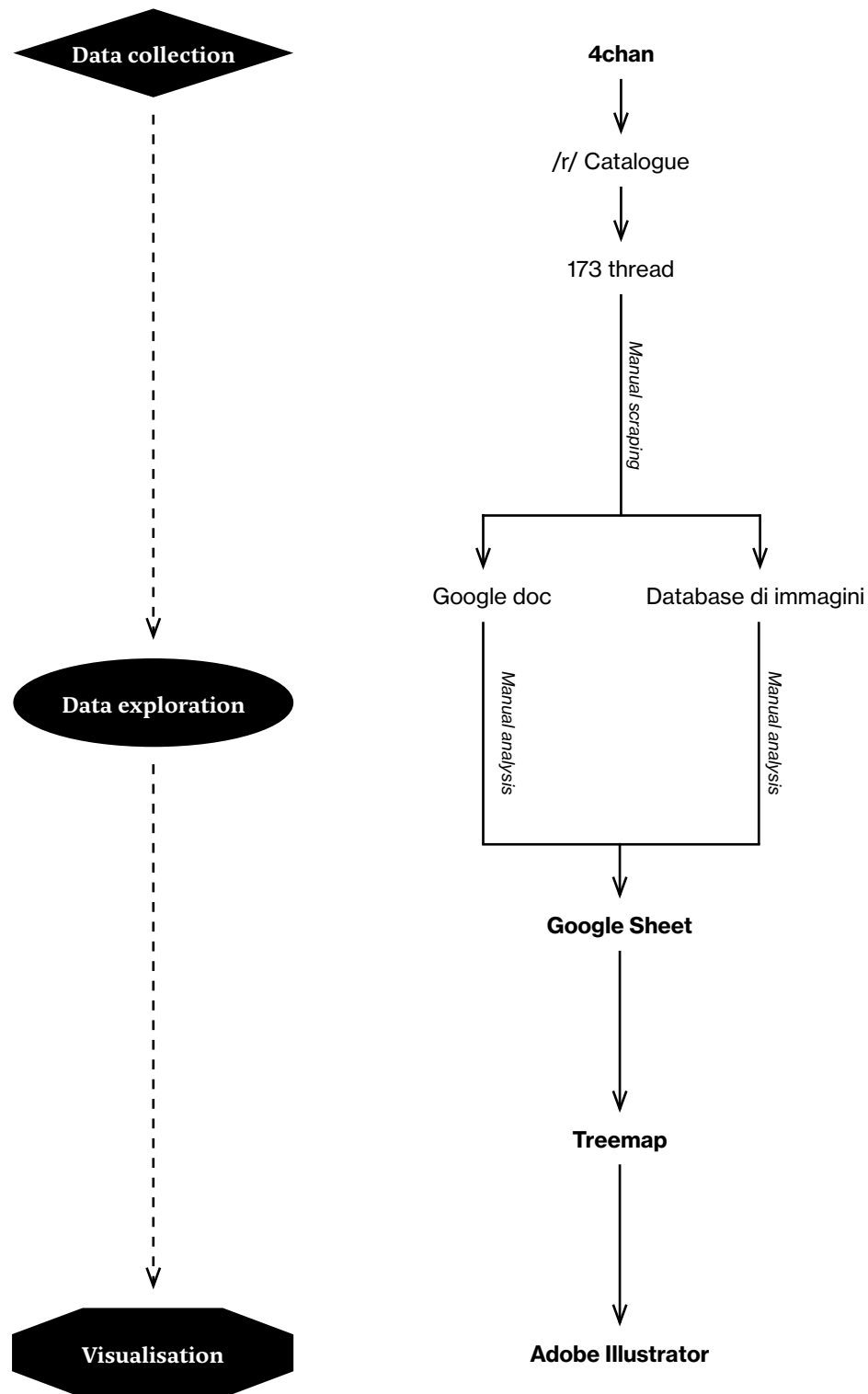
2.3.1 What Is Being Discussed on /r/

The first research question for studying /r/ (Adult Requests), “**what and how many requests are made on /r/ and which ones generate the most interactions?**” was designed with the intention of observing and exploring the directions in which the discussion on sexually explicit material is heading.

The existing tools for analyzing 4chan focus only on some boards whose threads are archived on a third-party site, which does not happen for /r/, so the research protocol (fig. 11) started with a manual analysis. First of all, only the threads present in the /r/catalogue were considered—so that the number of responses was final—which were randomly chosen on different days in June 2021 for a total of 173. Secondly, a copy of the original post and all the replies, including photographic material,⁵³ was created and archived so that it could

⁵³ The material has been permanently deleted after being consulted, only when necessary, to deduce the gender of the person in the request material and, especially in 2.3.1, what the request consisted of.

→ Fig. 11 Research protocol for the question: “what and how many requests are made on /r/ and which ones generate the most interactions?”



be analyzed even after the thread was deleted from 4chan. Finally, a qualitative analysis of the material thus obtained was carried out, focusing on three aspects: the definition of macro-categories applicable to requests, the gender of the subject in the request—if a person was mentioned—deduced from both the text and the first image of the post, and the number of responses for each request.

First of all, the following categories were formulated to classify the analyzed threads:

- ✦ *Image comment*, with requests such as “**Degrade this fat whore. Anything and everything goes say it all**” or “**Trading captions by email. Looking for long captions or wwyd to this girl. Pic unrelated**” where users attach sexually explicit insults or narratives of often violent and coercive sexual encounters to photographic material.
- ✦ *Image/Video Source*, with requests such as “**Sauce Please Who is she and where can I get a HD of this?**” or “**Sauce? Yes I know it's from Destiny Child but I need the artist.**” Where users try to track down the source of material they partly possess, such as a screenshot of a particular pornographic film or a certain character. The word “sauce” is an example of the vernacular, as it is used instead of the similar-sounding term “source.”
- ✦ *Images/videos matching a description*, with requests such as “**Anyone have the gif of a minimalistic line drawing of a butt walking? Its literally just four lines that move and they look like this butt**” or “**Looking for a manga/hentai where the guy wants the girl to make him cum on his own face while he's on his back. Then she licks it off his face,**” in which users try to describe the material they have seen and are looking to retrieve.
- ✦ *Images/videos similar to an image*, with requests such as “**anyone got more pics like this female pov with thigh-high socks**” or “**Thicc Karen ass thicc karens with huge glorious butts. bonus points if there wearing office pants**” with which users post material similar to what they want to retrieve.
- ✦ *Information about the person in the image/video*, with requests such as “**anyone know who this is?: shes from dare dorm tape party, but that's all I know**” or “**Which Suicide-Girls model is this?**” where users want to obtain information, usually about porn stars, erotic models and models, or, more recently, OnlyFans⁵⁴ content creators.

⁵⁴ OnlyFans is a website and app that offers a subscription-based entertainment service, particularly popular in the adult entertainment industry.

- ✦ *Image manipulation*, with requests such as “**X-ray please, wanna see that puss/tits: Thanks!**” or “**Edit Please edit this pic and expose her boobs**” where users post non-sexually explicit material and specify how they want it to be modified to make it so.
- ✦ *Masturbation to images*, with requests like “**Looking for some big dick tributes for my fiance!**” Or “**Birthday tribute Anonymous This slut turns 19 today, anyone got a tribute for her?**” where users post images on which they want other users to ejaculate and then share the result.
- ✦ *More images/videos of a subject*, with requests such as “**Need More: Anon have more of her?**” or “**Bishoujomom: Anyone got more of her? Pictures, video, anything?**” where users typically search for additional material of pornstars, models and erotic models, or OnlyFans content creators.
- ✦ *Suggestions*, which include more varied requests such as “**this pmv got taken down of spankbang the other day. probably because it had teen in the title or some shit. does anyone have it or know who made it?**” or “**Hello /r/, i very rarely post here but i'm at a loss. I am looking for galleries of a website named teen-sponsor.com**” where users generally seek advice to solve their problem.

➤ **Fig. 12 (pp. 84-85)**
Visualisation of the results of the first search query.

From the analysis of the requests, it emerged that those most related to image-based sexual abuse are image commenting, image manipulation, and image-based masturbation (see 2.3.1). However, even if the other categories mainly discuss legal and consensual pornographic or explicit material, users are not prohibited from making illegal requests. For example, they may ask to share leaked material (“**Evan Rachel Wood Leaked**” or “**Sunnyvier gumroad leak**”) or to distribute someone’s private sexual material without their consent (“**Got her real stuff? Apparently shez a Manhattan hotwife who gets passed around town**” or “**Does anyone have any nudes of this girl? Banged her a while ago and I know she has fucked a lot of people so I am hoping someone has something**”).

The visualisation of collected data, created with Treemap and Adobe Illustrator (**fig. 12**), allows us to highlight some aspects of the analyzed space. Firstly, the majority of requests belong to the image manipulation category, followed by the image/video source category, while some requests can be classified into multiple categories. Secondly, when it comes to people, the gender of the subject is mostly female (see

Categories

- Image comment
- Image/video source
- Image/videos matching a description
- Images/videos similar to an image
- Information about the person in the image/video
- Image manipulation
- Masturbation to images
- More images/videos of a subject
- Suggestions

Subject of the requested material

Person

- Female
- Male

No. of replies

Photoshop thread place your requests here and lets hope some good anons work their way..
259 replies

caption thread? post girls name/age in picture/request
88 replies

Sauce pl0x
88 replies

Nudeshop plz
205 replies

Im doing cum trib, post bitches with bangs only
60 replies

Post any old/blurry photos you have that you want upscaled. I'll run them through an app to improve their quality. Faces seem to work best
306 replies

X-Ray pls
194 replies

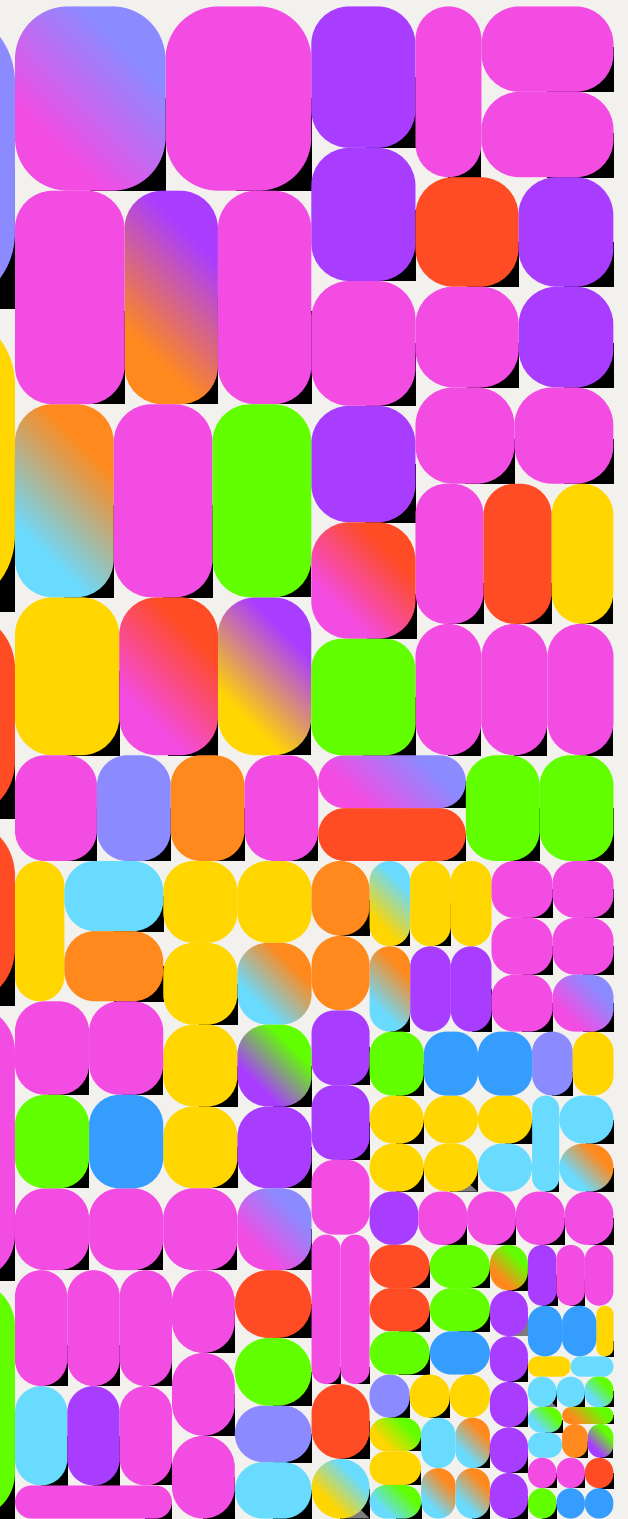
Nudeshop/cumshop requests drop em here and see if anyone wants to do it
162 replies

Doing trib requests for a little
139 replies

doing cum tribs same as last time all races fine
54 replies

first to respond with an image that has sort of a high resolution and the person isnt an overweight cow gets a cumshop. might do more if i feel like it.
194 replies

Pimeyes Requests Girls you KNOW have wins.
99 replies



1.3), confirming the gender dimension of image-based sexual abuse on 4chan as well. Finally, the threads that users have interacted with the most belong to the image manipulation and image-based masturbation categories, making it even more important to conduct a detailed analysis of these practices.

2.3.2 Vernacular of Image-Based Sexual Abuse

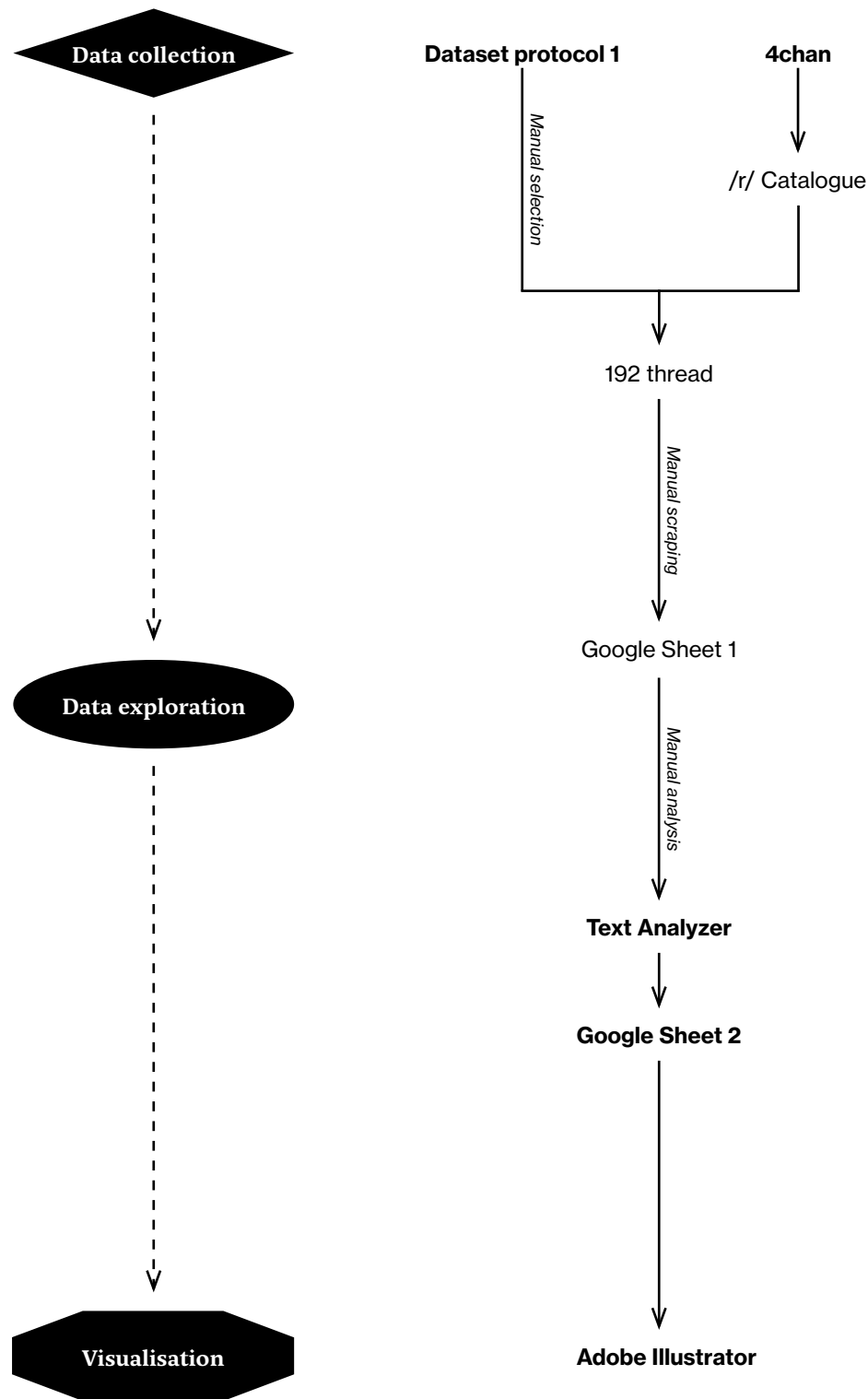
Practices on /r/

From the analysis just presented, one of the peculiarities of /r/ has emerged, namely being a space where the non-consensual creation of sexual material is carried out. The categories that are part of this practice are image manipulation, image-based masturbation, and image commenting. The second research question, “**what are the terms used to define the most requested non-consensual creation practices of sexual images on /r/?**” was formulated with the intent of studying in more detail the vernacular surrounding image-based sexual abuse.

The research protocol (fig. 13) started with a manual analysis of the text in the categories of image manipulation, image-based masturbation, and image comments that were previously collected. It was immediately evident that more data needed to be collected to obtain quantitative results, so the “catalogue” section of /r/ was consulted again, this time only selecting threads belonging to the aforementioned categories and archiving only the text. The collected material was standardized to be processed by an automatic text analyzer. This was done using the find and replace function available on Google Sheets to replace spaces in compound terms with an underscore, allowing them to be processed together, and to correct any typing errors. The standardized texts were then inputted into *Text Analyzer*, a free tool from the Online-Utility.org project that counts the occurrences of individual words within a text. The resulting list was manually analyzed, keeping only terms related to the non-consensual creation of sexual material, and removing, for example, common terms in pornography or on 4chan in general. Additionally, occurrences of synonyms were combined, with less frequently occurring variants being kept.

This analysis provided a list of vocabulary that encompasses the different practices that users request on /r/ while reading the threads in their entirety, combined with the viewing and analysing of the published images, supplied their meaning:

✦ *Bikinishop* is an image manipulation aimed at removing the swimwear of the person portrayed using photomonta-



→ Fig. 13
Research protocol for the question: “what are the terms used to define the most requested non-consensual creation practices of sexual images on /r/?”

ge techniques, where a naked body, consistent in features with that of the subject, is applied to the original.

- ✦ *Caption* is the practice of writing a sexually explicit and often violent or derogatory comment, of variable length (ranging from a few hundred characters to short stories), on a given photograph. The result is a new image with text overlaid (if brief) or placed next to it (if longer).
- ✦ *Cockshop* is an image manipulation in which a penis is inserted to interact in any way with the subject.
- ✦ *Cumshop* is an image manipulation in which seminal fluid is added to the subject's face.
- ✦ *Degrade* does not refer to a specific practice, but rather to all those that offer the possibility of humiliating the subject, obtained through various means: from image manipulation to the invention of a particularly degrading story, to the printing and subsequent public posting of photographs of the subject.
- ✦ *Deepfake* is an AI-based technique for human image synthesis used to combine and overlay existing images and videos with original videos or images using machine learning. In the case of the /r/ board on 4chan, it is used to make images or videos pornographic or explicit using various software or apps (often free and easily available). Therefore, the main difficulties lie in finding suitable images for the process, as the original subject must be captured in high-quality shots in a certain pose and from a certain angle, while pornographic images must be consistent with the subject's physical characteristics.
- ✦ *Deepnude* refers to an image created using deepfake technology with the intention of making the subject of the image appear nude. Deepnudes are created using a paid website where the user does not need to provide any images to combine with that of the original subject.
- ✦ *Donor* is the practice of cropping the body (or a part of it) of the subject in a photograph in order to be used in other photos and thus obtain the final manipulated image. Images of those who “donate” body parts to be used in photomontages that make an image sexually explicit are usually of porn professionals or other users.

- ✦ *Edit* means a generic manipulation that usually aims to make an image explicit, and more rarely, to improve the quality, lighting, or colours of the original.
- ✦ *Faceswap* is an image manipulation in which the face of one subject is positioned onto the body of another subject in a pornographic, erotic, or explicit image, “swapping” the face of those involved.
- ✦ *Fake* refers to the manipulation of any image so that it no longer corresponds to the original, or the process by which it is created. Although the term is commonly used to refer to false images, it has been included because on /r/ it is used exclusively to request any image manipulation that aims to make the subject sexually explicit.
- ✦ *Fuckshop* is an image manipulation technique that aims to insert the original subject into a pornographic scene depicting a sexual act.
- ✦ *Gifswap* is an image manipulation technique where the face of one subject is positioned onto another subject in a short pornographic video, thus swapping the face of those involved.
- ✦ *Master* is a user who is particularly skilled in any type of image manipulation and who is sometimes asked to ensure a good result.
- ✦ *Nudeshop* is an image manipulation technique aimed at making the subject appear naked, usually through the use of photomontage where a naked body consistent with the subject's features and lighting is applied to the original image.
- ✦ *Shop* is used to indicate the manipulation of an image carried out with Adobe Photoshop software (of which “shop” is a diminutive). In most cases, it is requested with the aim of making an image explicit, more rarely to improve the quality, lighting, or colours of the original.
- ✦ *Shopper* is a user who engages in image manipulation using Adobe Photoshop software.
- ✦ *Titshop* is an image manipulation technique that aims to expose the subject's chest.

- ✦ *Tribber* is a user who offers to practice tribute and as the executor, reserves the right to choose the subjects they deem appropriate.
- ✦ *Tribute* is a practice that involves masturbating and ejaculating onto the image or video of another person. To provide proof that the act has taken place, it is necessary to capture it in a photograph or short video that will be shared. The term “tribute” is the most general, but there are two types: the “cock tribute” (erect penis above the image) and the “cum tribute” (seminal fluid on the image).
- ✦ *Xray* is a photographic manipulation that involves increasing the transparency of a subject's clothing to expose their body. The operation is often carried out using AI-based software, so the subject must be taken from a certain angle and wear clothing with particular characteristics or colours. The name “xray” refers to the use of x-rays in diagnostic imaging.

The terms can be further divided into six main categories based on the action they involve. *Nudeshop*, *xray*, *titshop*, *deepfake*, *deepnude*, and *bikinishop* belong to the category of “manipulating the subject”, as the image operations focus on altering the depicted person, while keeping them within the original photograph. *Faceswap* and *gifswap* fall under “moving the subject to another image”, as the final result is obtained by transferring one person's face onto another's. *Cumshop*, *cockshop*, and *fuckshop* are categorized as “adding elements to the subject”, as they involve placing bodily fluids or anatomical parts next to or on top of the original image. *Shop*, *fake*, *edit*, *donor*, *degrade*, *master*, and *shopper* all fall under the category of “generic modification”, as the requester only specifies that they want a manipulated image, but not the specific techniques used. *Tribute* and *tribber* belong to the “physical action” category, as they are the only practices where the photo is not digitally modified, but altered through physical action. Lastly, *caption* belongs to the “comment” category, as it consists of adding text to the images.

Before proceeding with the viewing, it is important to underline that from the images that accompanied the texts and the tones of the conversations carried out by users, the vast majority of the victims are female. Not only that, the images posted to be edited are always non-explicit and include the faces of the victims, who are dressed girls in common contexts. Most of the time they are obtained by those who publish them simply by saving them from social media, in

other cases they are images made by or sent to those who share them, demonstrating even more personal knowledge of the victim. This makes this type of practice particularly dangerous: not only is it non-consensual, but the victim could potentially remain unaware of the existence of the images forever.

Continuing with the research protocol, the visualisation (fig. 14) was created with Adobe Illustrator using the word cloud model, useful for highlighting the number of occurrences of individual terms within the analyzed text. It emerges that the most requested actions are *tribute*, *nudeshop*, and *cumshop*, highlighting a preference of users for specific manipulations, in line with the community's modalities where there are more chances that a specific request will be taken on. However, the generic actions remain those with the most terms available. Finally, it can be noted how many terms are created coherently with what was seen in 2.2.1. In fact, some of them are existing words that take on a new meaning—such as *tribute* or *donor*—or new nuances of meaning—for example, *edit* or *fake*. Others are neologisms created by combining two words, as in the case of all those terms that end with *-shop* (which takes on the meaning of “manipulate”) or *-swap* (exchange) which indicate the action to be performed and are accompanied by words such as “nude,” “cum” or “face” that communicate the object of the action.

➤ Fig. 14 (pp. 92-93)
Visualisation of the results of the second search query.

Tribute^[172]

Nudeshop^[120]

Cumshop^[96]

Azione richiesta: **Manipulating the subject** / **Moving the subject to another image** / **Adding elements to the subject** / **Generic modification** / **Physical action** / **Comment**

Xray^[89] Shop^[66] Fake^[54]

Cockshop^[48] Faceswap^[45] Titshop^[33]

Caption^[33] Edit^[29] Donor^[24] Deepfake^[19] Deepnude^[13] Gifswap^[12]

Degrade^[9] Master^[8] Bikinishop^[7] Tribber^[6] Shopper^[4] Fuckshop^[3]

2.3.3 What We Talk About When We Talk About Girls, Women, and Rape on Telegram

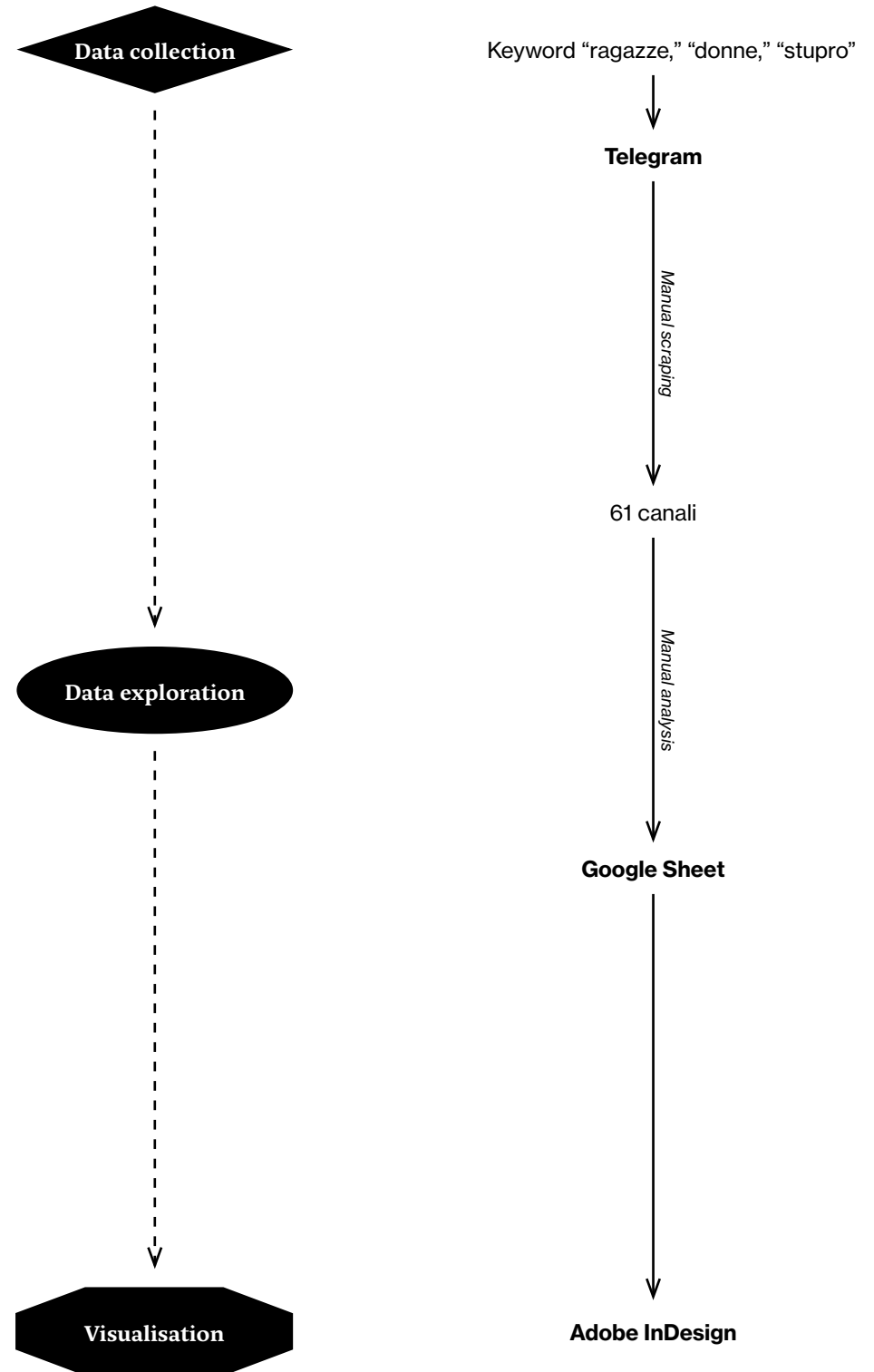
The first research question formulated to analyze the Italian community on Telegram was: “**how do global search results on Telegram change by inserting keywords related to image-based sexual abuse over a month?**” The chosen keywords were “donne” (women), “ragazze” (girls) and some vulgar and derogatory epithets for them (based on victimization), “sesso” (sex), and “stupro” (rape). The intended purpose was to obtain a list of channels and groups by noting the number of subscribers and their permanence on Telegram. The analysis of the collected data did not lead to identifying particular evidence, and attempts at visualization were also found to be uninteresting and chaotic.

Although the research question proved to be unsuccessful, an interesting feature to explore emerged day by day. In fact, even with keywords commonly referring to the female gender such as “ragazze” and “donne,” or to sexual violence such as “stupro,” the global search results exclusively recommended channels related to pornography, as was understandable from the allusive or explicit names. Therefore, the new research question, “**what terminology are the keywords ‘ragazze,’ ‘donne,’ and ‘stupro’ associated with the global search results on Telegram?**” was designed to analyse the scenarios suggested by the names of the channels.

The research protocol (fig. 15) was conducted based on the first question, so every day for 31 days (starting from March 4th, 2021), a global search was launched with each of the keywords, annotating the results. First of all, it is necessary to specify that the search returned exclusively public channels with few exceptions of little relevance (a user whose surname contained the word “donne”), but this will be discussed in more detail in 2.3.4.

For each keyword, a list of channels was obtained; assigning a category to certain terms or symbols present in their names made it possible to identify various pieces of evidence. The categories are:

- ✦ *Allusive emoji*, that is, a series of emojis also used in everyday life to allude to the sexual sphere (e.g. 🍆).
- ✦ *Derogatory or vulgar language*, such as “puttane” (sluts), “troie” (whores) or “fighe” (cunt/hottie).
- ✦ *Sexualized body parts*, such as “tette” (tits).



⁵⁵ “Troia” (whore), “cagna” (bitch), “zoccola” (“slut”).

→ **Fig. 15**
Research protocol for the question: “what terminology are the keywords ‘ragazze,’ ‘donne,’ and ‘stupro’ associated with the global search results on Telegram?”

Categories: allusive emoji / derogatory or vulgar language / sexualized body parts / reference to erotic encounters or sex work / sexual or pornographic references / reference to sexual violence

RAGAZZE

06/03/2021
 Incontri Ragazze Italia
 Ragazze fighe
 RAGAZZE IN CHAT 2.0 | NUOVO GRUPPO
 Ragazze whatsapp
 Tette Donne
 Ragazze Tettone
 Gratis Incontri con ragazze
 Sesso Incontri
 Ragazze
 Ragazze
 07/03/2021
 Ragazze in Chat
 09/03/2021
 Ragazze puttane stupro
 10/03/2021
 RAGAZZE IN CHAT 2.0 | NUOVO GRUPPO
 Ragazze in Chat
 Brazzer Incontri
 Ragazze Troie Fighe
 11/03/2021
 Ragazze Puttane
 Video HOT
 12/03/2021
 Ragazze Puttane
 Video HOT

Incontri Ragazze Italia
 La Bibbia | Ragazze | Troie
 13/03/2021
 Ragazze In Chat
 Incontri Brazzer
 14/03/2021
 Ragazze Puttane
 Troie Sesso
 16/03/2021
 Ragazze In Chat
 Nudes Brazzer
 Ragazze Donne
 Tette
 21/03/2021
 Ragazze Puttane
 Troie Sesso
 22/03/2021
 La Bibbia Sesso
 Ragazze Troie
 29/03/2021
 Sesso ragazze
 amatoriale puttane
 30/03/2021
 Ragazze in chat
 porche
 02/04/2021
 Ragazze In Chat
 OnlyFans Tik Tok
 03/04/2021
 Le Cagne Nudes
 Ragazze Brazzer
 05/04/2021
 RAGAZZE IN CHAT 2.0
 07/04/2021
 Ragazze In Chat

Incontri Brazzer
DONNE
 06/03/2021
 Donne | Cagne | Ragazze
 Tette Donne
 Ragazze Tettone
 Donne
 Donne amano
 sesso Donne
 Mature
 Belle Ragazze
 Ragazze Cagne
 Donne
 Ragazze Donne
 Tette
 Donne Ragazze Italia
 11/03/2021
 Guendalina Sesso
 Puttane Donne
 15/03/2021
 Video Amatoriali | Troie | Donne
 02/04/2021
 ♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀
 ♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀♀
 03/04/2021
 Piedi Donne
 Feticismo Ragazze
STUPRO
 06/03/2021
 Amatoriale troia
 guendalina stupro
 STUPRO TUA
 SORELLA
 UFFICIALE
 Stupro
 Le Cagne Stupro
 Tua Sorella
 STUPRO TUA
 SORELLA 2.0 | StuproTuaSorella

La Bibbia | Stupro Italiana disponibile
 qui
 Troia
 09/03/2021
 Ragazze puttane stupro
 11/03/2021
 La Bibbia | Dipreiste | Stupro
 15/03/2021
 Guendalina amatoriale stupro
 La Bibbia 5.0
 Stupro tua sorella
 16/03/2021
 Sesso Incontri Stupro
 20/03/2021
 Incontri Stupro
 Amatoriale Figa
 22/03/2021
 Cagne Stupro
 Pornografia
 Puttane
 23/03/2021
 Dipreisti Stupro
 Scopate Puttane
 STUPRO TUA
 SORELLA 2.0
 nuovo gruppo
 30/03/2021
 La Bibbia Stupro
 Tua Sorella
 02/04/2021
 Incontri Stupro
 Scopate Puttane
 07/04/2021
 Sesso Troie
 Stupro Zoccole

2. Studying the Online Vernacular of Image-Based Sexual Abuse

- Reference to erotic encounters or sex work, e.g., “ragazze in chat” (girls in chat) or “incontri ragazze” (meet girls), which often refer to dating sites or sex workers in the digital field.
- Sexual or pornographic references, such as “sesso” (sex), “amatoriale” (amateur), but also “Brazzers” (a well-known pornographic production company).
- Reference to sexual violence, for example, “stupro” (rape).

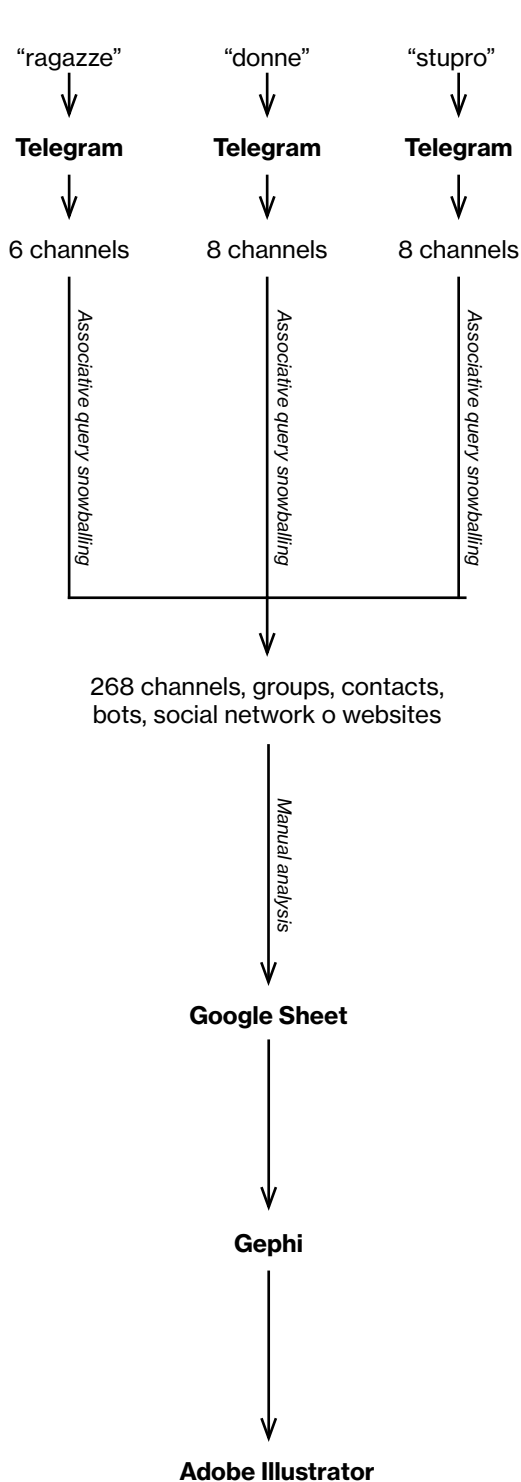
← Fig. 16
 Visualisation of the results of the third search query.

The visualization (fig. 16) was created using Adobe InDesign since it is mostly textual. The first finding is also the most obvious, that almost all channel names contain allusive terms aimed at implying the pornographic nature of the channel. Therefore, even typing generic keywords such as “ragazze” (girls) or “donne” (women) or regarding violence, which should not have anything pornographic about them, such as “stupro” (rape), the result returned is only pornographic content, highlighting its pervasive presence on Telegram. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the widespread use of derogatory terms in the names, which not only characterize the channel’s scope but also reflect the language used to identify women perceived by society as too uninhibited (see 1.4, 1.5). Finally, another interesting feature to note is that of emojis, which make the content of the channels clear even if paired with more neutral and commonly used words.

2.3.4 Map of the Italian Pornographic Subculture on Telegram

In the previous protocol, the keyword search showed only channels whose content mostly consisted of a few messages with links to external websites or other Telegram objects, hinting at the existence of additional spaces beyond those immediately visible. The research question, “how is the Italian pornographic subculture structured on Telegram?” was formulated based on this observation.

The research protocol (fig. 17) took place in July 2021 and started with a manual collection of concatenated links, using a technique similar to “associative query-snowballing” (Gray n.d.) but applied to links instead of keywords. In practice, once a keyword (“ragazze,” “donne,” and “stupro”) was entered, the channels that appeared as a result were opened, and if there were references to other digital spaces in these channels, they were noted and opened in turn, and so on, until a satisfactory number of connections was reached that could provide a reasonably accurate picture of the structure of the Italian pornographic subculture on Telegram. An em-



irical test of the completeness achieved was found when, at the start of the operation with the last keyword (“stupro”) as a starting point, most of the spaces referred to by the first or second level of links had already been noted in the dataset, indicating that the network of pornography on Telegram in Italian is composed of a fixed number of entities that the conducted research has explored.

The digital spaces reached were grouped into eight different categories, further divided into internal and external to Telegram. The first ones can be of five types:

- ✦ *Bot.*
- ✦ *Content channel*, where there are text messages, voice messages, or media such as videos or photos.
- ✦ *Personal channel*, which concerns a single user and is used by them to share content or information (mainly used by sex workers).
- ✦ *Showcase channel*, where there are only messages containing links that refer to other spaces and a brief introduction.
- ✦ *User contact.*
- ✦ *Group.*

The external spaces, on the other hand, can be *pages on social networks* or *websites*.

Another important finding is that the theme of pornography, in some cases, is linked to that of gambling, as some of the channels led to spaces that exposed alleged tricks to “vincere soldi sempre” (always win money).

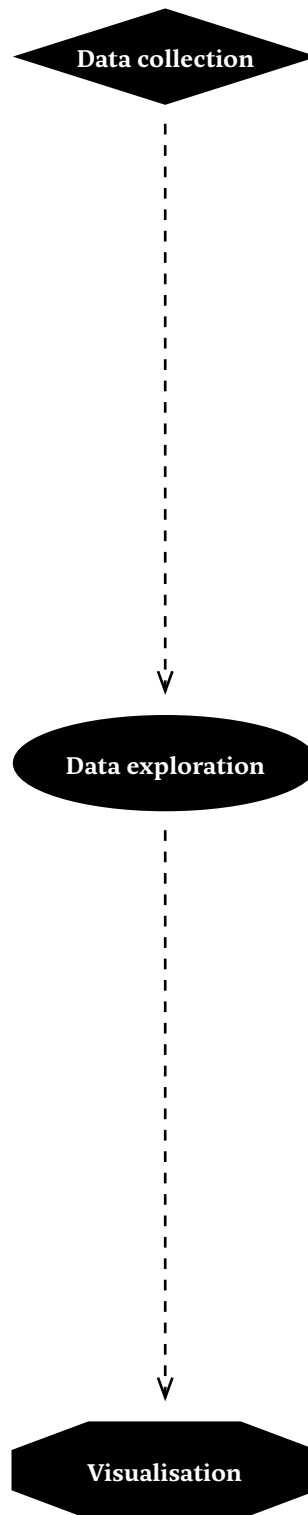
The visualisation (fig. 18) was created with Gephi and finalized with Adobe Illustrator. The decision to exclude the names of the spaces analyzed was a design and ethical choice, as we did not want to provide a tool useful for tracking certain places where violent and potentially illegal actions are perpetrated. The only terms present are the 3 keywords and references useful for locating in the network the spaces on which the next research protocol will focus (Group A, Group B, Group C, Group D).

The first evidence is that, in line with what was discussed in section 2.3.3, most of the spaces that the user can reach by using non-sexual keywords, but related to the female gender or a form of violence, are pornographic.

The second evidence is that the links between channels, groups, contacts, bots, social pages, and websites are structured in clusters. Even in cases where there are a high number of links between one space and another (fig. 19), certain types of central spaces connected to many elements can be noticed, which therefore act as a sort of “entrance” to the entire structure, as also evident from the group in fig. 20. The clusters are visible in the overall arrangement, suggesting the

← Fig. 17 Research protocol for the question: “how is the Italian pornographic subculture structured on Telegram?”

↘ Fig. 18 (pp. 100-101) Visualisation of the results of the fourth search query.



● Keyword

Spazi interni a Telegram

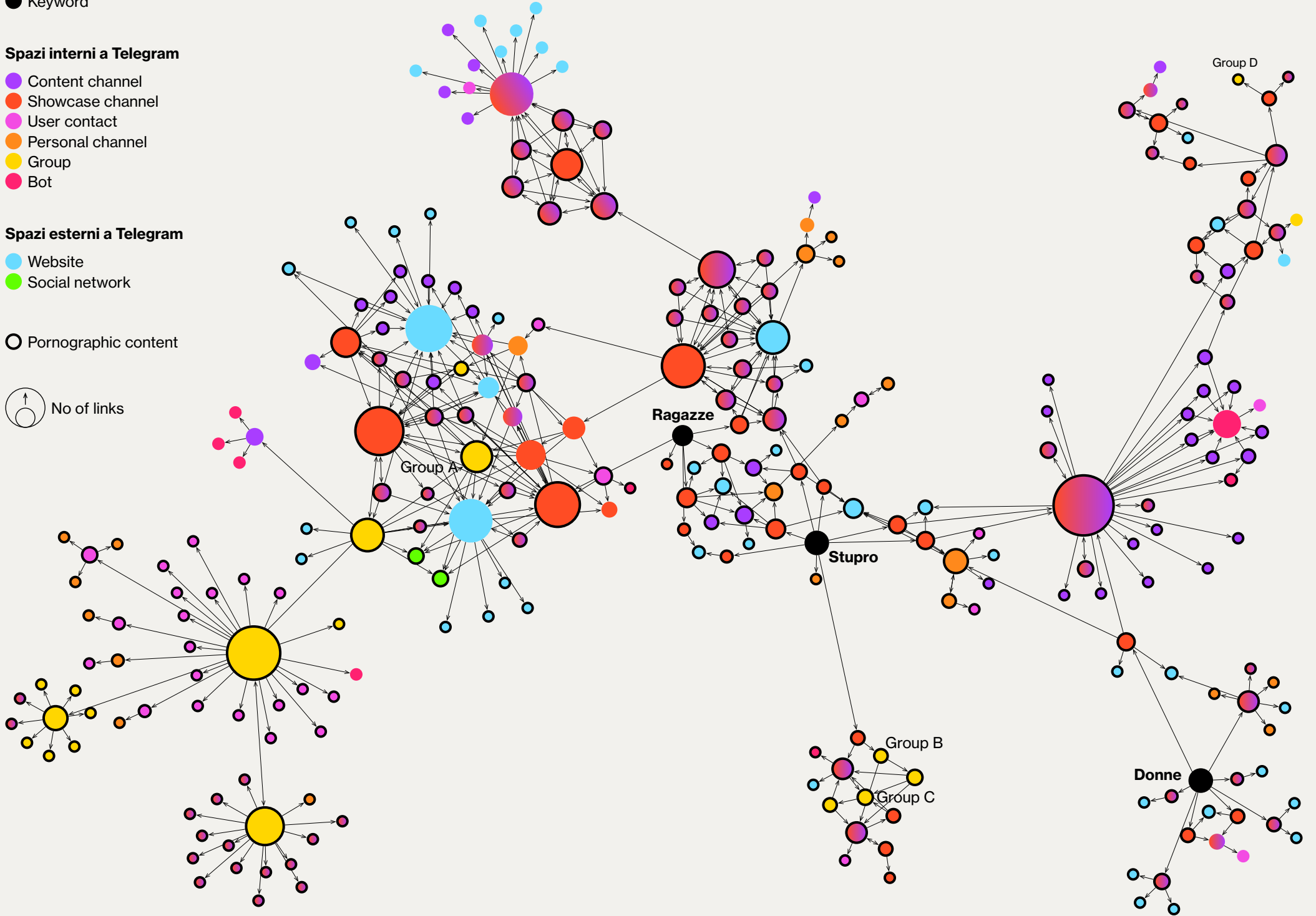
- Content channel
- Showcase channel
- User contact
- Personal channel
- Group
- Bot

Spazi esterni a Telegram

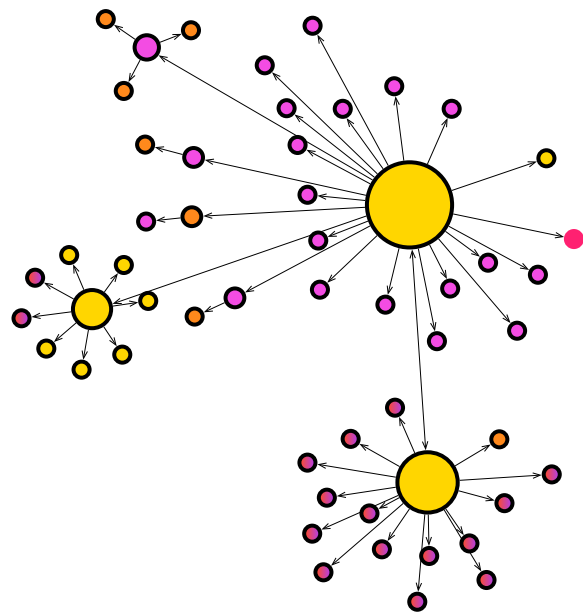
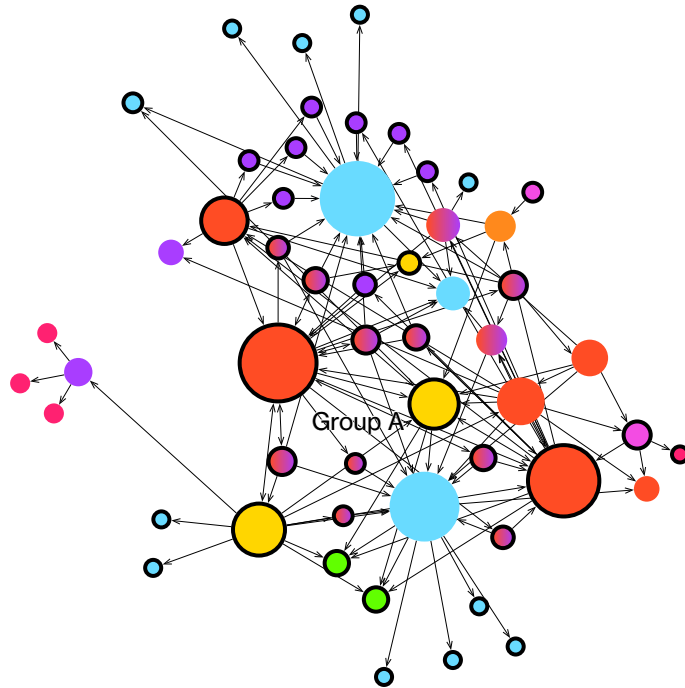
- Website
- Social network

○ Pornographic content

⬆ No of links



→ Fig. 19
In clusters with a larger number of connections, there are also central elements that are linked to and from which several spaces are linked.

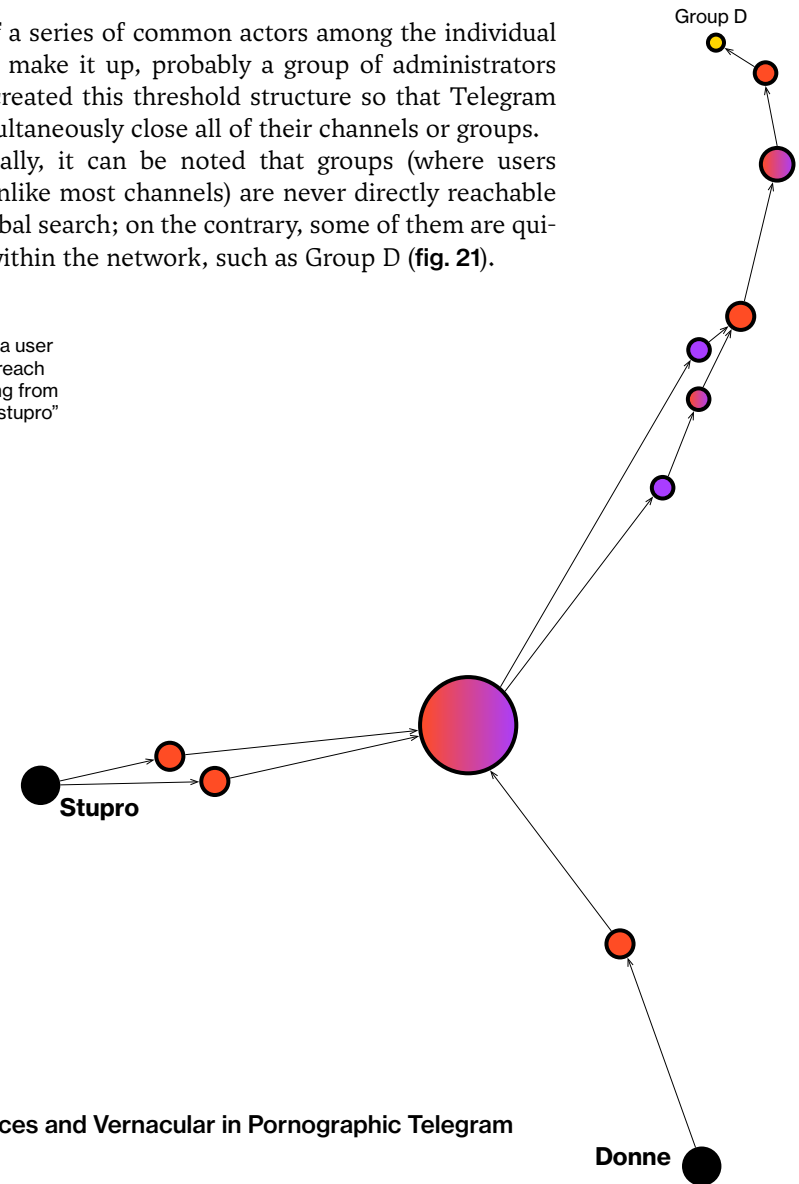


← Fig. 20
Many clusters have a space that acts as an “entry point” for all the environments of which it is composed, in this case, there are 3 groups.

presence of a series of common actors among the individual spaces that make it up, probably a group of administrators who have created this threshold structure so that Telegram cannot simultaneously close all of their channels or groups.

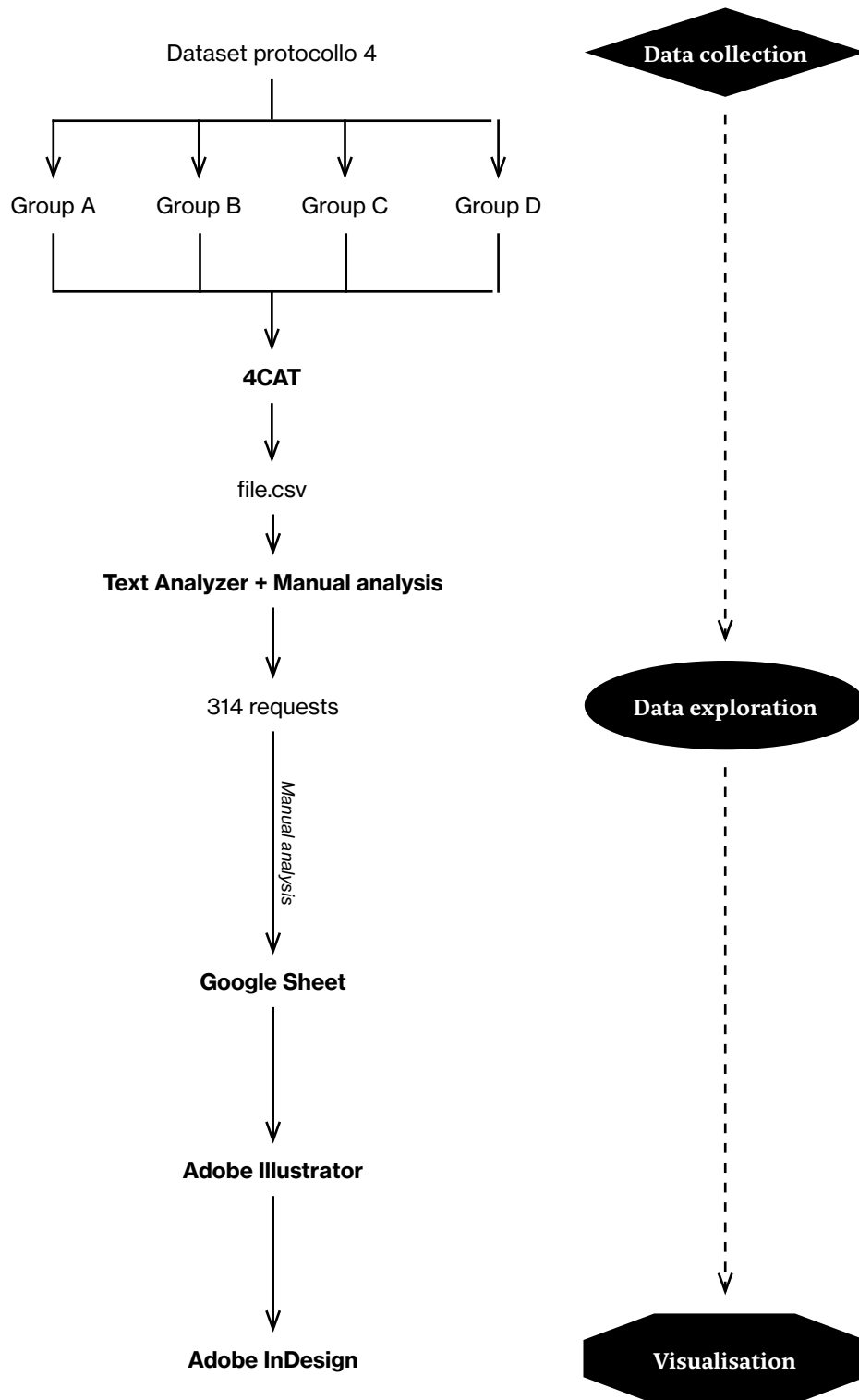
Finally, it can be noted that groups (where users can chat, unlike most channels) are never directly reachable through global search; on the contrary, some of them are quite hidden within the network, such as Group D (fig. 21).

→ Fig. 21
The steps that a user must follow to reach Group D starting from the keywords “stupro” or “donne.”



2.3.5 Practices and Vernacular in Pornographic Telegram Groups

As already mentioned, the research protocol that will be presented is based on four of the groups identified through the previous analysis, as they are the spaces where users can communicate with each other and therefore spaces where a certain type of vernacular language is created and used. The research question, “**what are the practices of image-based sexual abuse discussed in Italian pornographic groups on Telegram and how are they communicated?**” was formulated to allow for a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the practices and their vernacular language.



The research protocol (fig. 22) was executed in August 2021 and began with the selection of four groups that appeared to be the most active and in which discussions were entirely conducted in Italian. Their content was extracted using *4CAT*, a tool created by Peeters and Hagen (2019), which, among other functions, allows for entity scraping, such as groups, once Telegram API credentials are provided. The result was four datasets with a series of information, including the text of all messages (in reverse chronological order) and the type of sender. Messages sent by bots were removed, and the rest were entered into *Text Analyzer* to count the repetition of phrases composed of a certain number of words. The analysis revealed that within the thousands of messages exchanged in the groups, there are certain ones that are repeated numerous times with identical wording. This practice is probably intended to have a better chance of attracting attention—and therefore receiving a response—within an environment where activity is incessant and hundreds of messages are sent every minute. It was thought to be interesting to collect and analyze the most repeated messages within each group, so it was decided to consider those repeated more than 5 times. The requests were identified not only through *Text Analyzer*, which detects only phrases of a minimum of two and maximum of eight words, but also through the tools integrated into Google Sheets, especially by rearranging rows with texts in alphabetical order and hiding cells with few words/emojis or that were empty using filters.

Furthermore, certain phrases were excluded based on criteria of intent, clarity, and relevance to image-based sexual abuse. In fact, all requests or offers of presumably legal material, such as pornographic videos or images of erotic professionals, or in-person meetings were left aside. Additionally, phrases without explicit objects or actions or where the object or action was unclear were eliminated. Finally, another type of material discarded for ethical reasons, despite its relevance to image-based sexual abuse, was that which explicitly mentioned personal data.

The final dataset obtained from this process is a list of 313 phrases, which were analysed for the proposed or requested actions and subjects. The actions were divided into eight categories:

- ✦ *Having*, which means when a user asks if others have a certain type of material.
- ✦ *Searching*, meaning when a user is looking for a certain type of material.
- ✦ *Commenting*, when a user proposes or requests others to write or say something about a certain material or subject.

← Fig. 22
 Research protocol for the question: "what are the practices of image-based sexual abuse discussed in Italian pornographic groups on Telegram and how are they communicated?"

These comments are similar to the captions discussed in 2.3.2 and have the same sexually-explicit nature.

- ✦ *Degrading*, when a user proposes or requests others to verbally insult and degrade a subject, it is therefore similar to a comment but with a more humiliating nature.
- ✦ *Ejaculating*, when a user proposes to masturbate or asks others to masturbate to a certain type of image and/or videos to keep a snapshot of the act (just like with the tribute discussed in 2.3.2).
- ✦ *Sending*, when a user proposes or requests to send a certain type of material.
- ✦ *Showing*, when a user proposes or requests to show a certain type of material.
- ✦ *Giving*, when a user proposes or requests to give away a certain type of material without any return.
- ✦ *Trading*, when a user proposes to trade a certain type of material.

The material in question can have different types of subjects (in turn divided into eleven categories) which may or may not specify the gender. However, it is not uncommon for a type of material to be requested rather than a person, such as child pornography or rape.

It is important to emphasize that while some requests undoubtedly fall within the practices of image-based sexual abuse and some also fall into other types of abuse - think of child pornography - many others are not so detailed as to have definitive proof of their non-consensual nature. For example, in phrases like “**SCAMBIO FIDANZATA PER FIDANZATA E COMMENTIAMO INSIEME**” (swap girlfriend for girlfriend and comment together) or “**chi scambia la propria tipa?**” (who swaps their girl?) or even “**chi commenta amica**” (who comments on a friend), it is difficult to know for certain whether the people being talked about are aware of the action or not. However, it was decided to keep all of these phrases, firstly because it is probably impossible for all the mentioned subjects to be aware of what is happening with their image, and secondly because it is already significant to know that partners, parents, exes, relatives or even children are being talked about so frequently in groups dedicated to pornography.

In the visualisation, we chose to focus on the characteristics of each individual request, which on their own indicate the practices and their communication. Each request was analyzed in a precise manner (fig. 23), identifying the requested action or actions that were assigned a colour, while the object of the request, if it was a person, was assigned a solid geometric shape (coloured according to gender) or, if it was a type of material, was assigned an empty geometric

shape. The categories in which people and requested materials were divided were clustered, for example, both “wife” and “girlfriend” fall under “partner;” furthermore, to avoid creating excessive confusion, each shape was only used at the first mention of the corresponding person or material. For example, in a request that mentions both “aunt” and “cousin”, only the corresponding shape for “relative” was used once. A summary visualization of all the material was then created using Adobe Illustrator (fig. 24): what emerges is the frequency with which certain actions and subjects are requested more than others. A particularly significant result is the clear majority of exchanges among the various practices that shows how the female body (the most requested gender) is treated as a commodity to be bartered. Finally, it is evident that users seem to operate in an atmosphere of impunity, as abusive practices, albeit still poorly regulated, are discussed alongside material depicting minors and actual child pornography: the quantity of these requests should make us reflect on what was discussed in 2.2.3.2 regarding the affordances of Telegram and the environment they potentially create.

Although it was not possible to display all aspects of these requests, it is important to focus on three of them that emerged from their reading and were not represented in the visualization. First, users try to attract attention and move the conversation to a private and sometimes secret chat. In fact, the number of users who send images or videos directly to these groups is relatively low, and in any case, they are often previews. This happens not only because users seek privacy but also because many of them are limited (see 2.2.3.2). Furthermore, these groups pose a real danger regarding the grooming of minors. In fact, users who claim to be minors, for example, by writing their year of birth, are very numerous. Some of them are definitely minors who often share photos of other minors or themselves, contributing to creating and spreading what is, in fact, child pornography. However, other users who claim to be minors and, above all, want to chat with minors, could easily be paedophile groomers, known for using this grooming technique in the world of chat. Finally, more users have stated that they possess archives of files that have been sent to them by others or that they have accumulated over time—one of the reasons why many clarify from the beginning their intention to request “rare” or “unreleased” material that is not “**la solita roba che gira in tutte le chat**” (the usual stuff that circulates in all chats)—which makes us reflect on the difficulty, already discussed, of eliminating non-consensual material online.

➤ **Fig. 23 (pp. 108-117)**
Visualisation of the results of the fifth search query.

In the **requests** sent in **Telegram groups**, several specifications are mentioned, which have been divided into the following **categories**.

Action

Trading
Ejaculating
Commenting
Searching
Showing
Degrading
Having
Sending
Giving

Person


Partner
Ex
Parent
Friend
Son/daughter
Relative
Minor
Boy/girl
Sibling
Acquaintance
Vip


Gender

Female
Male
Unspecified


Category


Rape
Child pornography
Oral sex
Spy Cam
Live


 **Regalo** con una piccola offerta video di **pedo** e **STUPRI** rari contattatemi per video assaggio,


 **umilio** pesantemente **ex** o **fidanzata** sono un porco vi faccio **sborrare** aggiungetemi voi sono limitato

 **Scambio ex**


 **Chi** mi fa **segare** su sua **madre zia fidanzata** o **matrigna** ?

 **Mbisex**, maturo, porco, **commento** le vostre **amiche** e le **donne di famiglia**


 **Commento** spudoratamente e **sego** la vostra **moglie MAMMMA** o **fidanzata** anche **amiche,amiche** non più piccola di 16.


 **Cerco** cornuto o aspirante per **commentare** la sua **ragazza**. Massima riservatezza.


 **Chi scambia** foto di **amiche** in costume dov'è si vede sia culo che pianta dei piedi per lo stesso. Scrivetemi sono limitato


 **Commento pesantemente** la **vostra troia mostrata** in tacchi o vestitini corti


 **Scambio pedo**

 **x** chi si eccita a **mostrare** e farsi **commentare** la **propria donna...** io 29 anni pronto ad **umiliare** anche con msg vocali


 **Chi Tributa** con doppio o stampa il viso della **mia ragazza?** Foto vestita, 23 anni.


 **Commento moglie** o **ragazza** mentre mi **sego**, m17 scrivetemi o ditemi che vi scrivo io


 **Sego** e **commento pesantemente** **parenti , fidanzate , cugine e ex**

 **Scambio tributi** su **vip** per altri **tributi** su **vip**


o **stupri**


 **Scambio pompini** ita rari Non mando prima **Cerco** solo simili


 **Cerco** video **ragazze** Caserta e dintorni

 **Commento** e **insulto ragazze** e **famose** come un porco anche note vocali scrivetemi

 **Commento** **amiche mamme sorelle cugine fidanzate zie ex** ecc anche con gif


 **Chi scambia** **amiche, spy amiche** o piedi **amiche** o **tipe** di Genova mi scriva


 **SCAMBIO FIDANZATA PER FIDANZATA E COMMENTIAMO INSIEME**


 **A** chi va **sega** in chiamata (no video) guardando video e foto di **teen** o parlandomi della **fidanzata, mamma** ecc ecc...?


 **Chi tributa**


amiche in costume?


 **Chi pisella tipe** con doppio dispositivo


 **Cerco** padre che **mostra** sua **figlia** in privato


 **CHI SCAMBIA EX O FIDANZATA IN CHAT CON TIMER SOLO SERI**

 **Cerco** chi mi fa **segare** su **tettone** esagerate amatoriali con viso, in cam

 **Qualcuno** che mi faccia **segare** sulla **propria ragazza/ sorella**, anche piedi


 **Faccio cumtribute** su **famose** scrivetemi


 **Chi ha ex 17/19** anni massimo(ho solo foto)

 **Commento** e **scambio** foto di **ragazza mamma zia sorella** ecc


 **Commento** e/o


sego mamme, zie, mogli, sorelle.....


 **SCAMBIO RAGAZZE DI CIVITAVECCHIA SCRIVETEMI SOLO SE AVETE RAGAZZE DI CIVITAVECCHIA**


 **Chi** mi **manda** qualche **amica, parente, zia, mamma, conoscente?** Magari faccio qualche video mentre mi **sego** e **commento**


 **scambio** mia **figlia** e mie **nipoti** con **figlia, sorella, fidanzata, ex** o **cugina** vere anche **spiate** scrivetemi io non posso

 **Scambio** video **teen** piedi e **trans**


 **Chi ha** la **mamma** porca **commento**


 **Chi sa umiliare** bene **amiche** mi scriva in pvt no perdi tempo no persone che non sanno **umiliare**


 **scambio teen** video


 **Chi scambia tributi** su **vip**

 **Sego** su doppio dispositivo foto vostre **amiche** o **compagne di classe 09/08** anche vestite, oppure commento

 **Buongiorno** chi va di **scambiare** la propria **fidanzata** (lei non lo sa) per divertimento in segreta con foto viso e video **pompino**

 **CHI HA CONTATTI DI PARENTI, CUGINE SORELLE ZIE MAMME TROIE MI SCRIVA SCAMBIO CON TUTTO**


 **Chi mi fa sborrare** con la propria **mamma** o **moglie** o con un **amica** o con sua **fidanzata** sono limitato


 **chi scambia** la **propria tipa?**


 **Chi**

mi fa **segare** la **propria donna, figlia** o **sorella** in cam mentre voi la inquadrare? Solo serie no fake solo in cam .. sono limitato

 **CHI FA REGALINO PEDO MOM?**

 **Chi scambia pedomom** mi scriva in privato grz. Sono limitato

 **Mamma** nel cassetto ha intimo sexy e dildi ...chi **commenta** e se la **sega** in video?

 **Cerco** video delle vostre **mamme** con la figa pelosa **scambio** con quello che volete (**ho** una foto di mia **sorella** che mi mostra la vagina)

 **Pisello vip** e **tiktoker**

 **Scambio minorenni**

 **Commento** la **vostra ragazza, moglie, amante, mamma, zia, cugina, sorella, figlia, amiche,**

amica di mamma

☀️🌑☀️☀️
Fatemi **sborrare** forte con **vostre tipe, amiche, tettone o moglie milf**, scrivetemi sono limitato

☀️☀️☀️☀️
scambio mamma e **sorella** nude reali per **familiari, mogli e ragazze**

🌑 **SCAMBIO** TIPE DI TORINO CON NICK INSTA PER PARI

🌑🌑☀️ Chi mi fa **sborrare mostrandomi ex amiche fidanzate** nude e **commento**

☀️ **Commento** fidanzata

☀️☀️☀️☀️☀️
scambio mamma(45) e **sorella(17)** nude reali per **familiari, mogli e fidanzate**

🌑 Chi **commenta** e **sega** in chiamata la mia **ex** mi scriva

🌑 chi **insulta** pesantemente **amiche** vestite e in costume troie

scrivetemi

☀️ Chi mi fa **commentare** la **propria troia** mi scriva

☀️ Chi **commenta** foto di mia **cugina?** Non ho nudo

☀️ Qualcuno **ha** foto/video di **ragazzine** in minigonna che pisciano (fuori dalle discoteche, nei parcheggi, nei vicoli)???

📀 **Cerco** qualcuno per **sega** su **vip** in chiamata audio. Scrivetemi sono limitato

☀️☀️☀️☀️
Scambio una foto dei piedi di mia **sorella** di 21 anni o una foto in costume di mia **cugina o8** per **pedo**

☀️ **Commento** **PESANTE** e mi **sego** le foto della **vostra donna...** vi **racconto** come la scoperei... SCRIVETEMI ci divertiamo!!

🌑 Qualcuno di Caserta o provincia

commentiamo ragazze della zona (San Prisco, Portico, Macerata, Santa Maria)

☀️ **Scambio** ragazza attuale scrivetemi

📀 **Scambio** teen

📀 **Scambio** teen 10 o 20 o 30 o 40 o 50 a testa solo gente seria non mando per primo

☀️📀 **Scambio** mia **moglie** 📀 Foto hot con viso video **pompino** **Scambio** solo in segreta

🌑 Chi **commenta** **pesante** e **manda** giff per **tipe**

☀️☀️☀️ Chi mi fa **commentare** **mamme zie o mogli**

☀️ Chi **scambia** la **ragazza** in pvt con prova d'identità

📀 Chi **scambia** **pedo?**

☀️ **Inventate** **delle storie** **dove molestate** mia **sorella** in pubblico? Sono

limitato, mando foto

🌑 Chi **tributa** o **pisella** con doppio dispositivo? Ampia scelta di **amiche**

☀️ **Scambio** foto **fidanzata** 22 anni no fake scrivetemi

🌑 **SCAMBIO** FOTO MIA EX NUDA PER EX IN SEGRETA CON TIMER

☀️ Chi **crea** **storia stupro** su **mia ragazza?** VESTITA

☀️ Chi **fa cum tributa** su mia **cugina**

☀️ Chi **mostra** la **propria ragazza** in chat per **sega?** Sono limitato aggiungetemi o scrivetemi

☀️ **Mostro** la **mia ragazza** a chi fa lo stesso

☀️ **Mostro** la **mia ragazza** a dotati per **commentarla pesantemente** e **segarla**

☀️ Qualche cuck che **mostra** e fa **commentare** la

tipa in segreta? lo romano con bel cazzo

🌑 **Scambio** ex ragazza per simile reale!! Non inizio io

☀️ **Scambio** **fidanzata** reale SOLO per lo stesso, segreta con timer, limitato

📀 **SCAMBIO** MEGA TEEN GAY IN PVT

☀️ **cerco** video **minorenni** che squirtano, **scambio** bene

☀️ Chi mi fa **sborrare** e **commentare** **moglie o ragazza** in privato?

🌑 Chi **scambia** **ex?**

☀️☀️ Chi **scambia** **mamma** o **nonna** scambio bene (m3g da 600 GB

🌑 **Commento** **tipe** in pvt **Commento tipe** in pvt **Commento tipe** in pvt

☀️🌑 41 anni **commento** vostre **amiche**

o **fidanzata** scrivetemi

📀 Chi **ha o7 o6 o8** che scopano?

🌑☀️☀️ Chi **ha** video di **pompini** di **amiche** o **sorelle** o **cugine** mi contatti

📀 Chi **scambia** **vip** per **sega?**

☀️ **Mostro** la mia **fidanzata** solamente a 07 08 09

📀 **Scambio** video **teen**

☀️ se mi **mandate** foto delle **vostre ragazze** o di chi volete vi **mando** video dove mi **sego** (solo nudo)

📀 **Spy** gay **scambio**

📀📀 **cerco** **pompini teen**

☀️ Chi **scambia** video **teen** troiette? Sono limitato scrivetemi

☀️ CHI VUOLE **TRIBUTARIE** UNA MILF ? ! CHI VUOLE **TRIBUTARIE**

UNA MILF ? !

☀️🌑☀️ **Pisello** le vostre **mogli/ fidanzate/ex amiche**, (nudes) con DOPPIO DISPOSITIVO

🌑 **Scambio** i video della mia **ex** per stesso solo reali

☀️☀️ **Scambio** **mamma** per **mamma** o **zia**

📀📀📀📀 **SCAMBIO** VIDEO DI TUTTI I TIPI, **PEDO, TEENS, SPY CAM, DIRETTE** HOT, SCRIVETEMI VOI IO SONO LIMITATO

🌑📀📀 **SCAMBIO** NUDES + INSTA SOLO TIPE DI MILANO SOLO PER LO STESSO NON INVIO PER PRIMO 📀📀

🌑☀️ A chi **tributa** su **amiche minorenni** gli do il contatto

📀 **Cerco** **stupri**

☀️ Chi ha **ragazzini** che scopano?non

scambio

🌑🌑 **Mando** cazzo (19cm) a chi mi fa **sega** su **ex** o **amiche** (anche no nudo)

☀️☀️ **MANDO** GALLERIA O VIDEO A SCELTA SE MI **MANDATE** FOTO DI VOSTRA **SORELLA** O **PARENTI** GIOVANI MENTRE DORMONO

🌑 Mi **sego** su qualsiasi **ragazza** accanto a voi che riprendete in videochiamata

📀📀📀📀📀 Chi **scambia** mega **PED/ TEEN** con un files misto da 40.000 (**stupri, spy, ped, teen, famose** Ecc) scrivetemi voi!! 🍆🍆🍆🍆

🌑 Sardi che si **segano** in chat con me su **tipe** di Cagliari e dintorni?

🌑☀️ **Scambio** **ex** da 2006 in giù fino a 2002 per **ex** scrivetemi in privato sono limitato

🌑 **SCAMBIO**

EX RAGAZZA IN CARNE

Scambio spy al mare...scrivetemi

TRIBUTO RAGAZZINE O MILF CON DOPPIO DISPOSITIVO

Bull **commento pesantemente** e mi **sego** anche in chiamata su **mogli** cuck limitato

Cerco persona seria che **fa cumtribute** sulle mie **amiche** arrapanti solo con doppio dispositivo e in videochiamata

Chi **manda** foto di **mamma zia fidanzata** o **matrigna** che **commento** ?

Chi mi fa **sborrare** con la sua **fidanzata** anche in segreta con timer

Chi mi fa **sborrare** sulla propria **moglie fidanzata** o **amica**!?

Chi **pisella** mia **amica** non

ho nudi doppio dispositivo scrivetemi voi o aggiungetemi sono limitato

Commento se volete **insulto** con gif anche **ex,amiche** o **conoscenti** anche in costume contattatemi sono limitato

Cornuti che godono a farsi **commentare** la **moglie** da pervertito? Scrivo io

Esco il cazzo in cambio di video di **teen** ho 16 anni e sono dotato

Mostro video **pompa** e foto con viso della mia **fidanzata** per divertimento in segreta qualcuno che abbia lo stesso materiale

Scambio **ex ragazza** per **ex** o **fidanzata**.. scrivetemi o agg sono limit

Scambio i video **ex** solo reali con video **ex**

SCAMBIO SORELLA, CUGINA ED EX SOLO PER LO STESSO REAL NO PERDITEMPO

Cerco qualcuno che mi faccia **segare** su **amica, fidanzata, ex, madre** o **sorella**... Anche con timer

Cerco **scambio teen** ita inedite (**ex**, chat private, video instagram)

Cerco video **ragazze 07 06 08** non scambio

Chi mi fa **commentare** **amiche/ex/ fida**? Anche in chat segreta, scrivetemi che sono limitato

Chi mi fa **segare** la propria **fidanzata**

Chi mi fa **segare** su **mamma, sorella, zia, cugina, moglie** o **ragazza**? Scrivetemi

Chi **mostra**

fidanzata o **ex** in segreta? Solo veri porci, la **commentiamo** e **seghiamo** insieme. Scrivetemi che ci divertiamo

Chi **scambia ex** o amatoriali **teen**?

Chi si vuole far **commentare** la **propria troia** mi scriva

Mi **sego** mentre **riprendi di nascosto** la **tua lei** in videochiamata

Mi **sego** sulle vostre **amiche, cugine** ecc. O se vi trovate in pubblico, sulle **passanti** ecc in video chiamata! Contattatemi!!

Scambio foto di **ragazze** in intimo e nude ... scrivetemi sono limitato

Scambio foto **ex** in chat segreta

Scambio video **stupri** ita amatoriali

Chi di Caserta **mostro** mia **sorella** chi **ha** 2007/2008/2006?

Chi **ha** una **sorellina** mi scriva?

Chi **insulta** pesantemente e **commenta** **amiche** vestite

Chi **mostra** **amiche** o **conoscenti** Ke indossano tacchi o vestitini corti? **Commento**

Io maturo perverso **cerco** chi **mostra** la propria **mamma** per fantasie estreme

Scambio **dirette** per inedite ita o **teen** ita solo per lo stesso o **ex**, video e foto instagram, solo gente seria e con archivi enormi.

Scambio **fida** reale in segreta con timer, tutte foto con viso iniziamo vestita e poi spogliamo... SOLO SERI !!!!

scambio **sorella** per lo

stesso non mando per primo scrivete in pvt

Scambio **tettone**

Scambio video di **pompini** e sborrata facciali con mia **ragazza** io 19 lei **17 anni**, solo video inedito, non mando per primo

Pompini ita rari dialogato con venuta. **Scambio** per lo stesso. No roba che troviamo qui sopra non mando prima

Avete **ragazze** della provincia di Latina ?

cerco chi si **sega** su foto della mia **fidanzata** troietta in videochiamata

CERCO MEGA **TEEN GAY** SCRIVETEMI

chi **ha** 07 in su ita minimo **pompe**? dialogato

Chi mi da **segare** sulla propria **moglie**

fidanzata ecc ho 14 anni molto dotato marocchino mulatto

Chi **scambia** **mamma**

Chi **scambia** **VERA ex** o **fidanzata** ?

Chi si fa **commentare** **ex fidanzata** o **moglie** in segreta con timer anche con gif rare?

Commento chi **mostra** **mamma, moglie, zia cugina** ecc

Commento e **insulto** giovani puttane in modo pesante. **Sorelline, cugine, fidanzate**. Anche giovanissime.

scambio **ex 05**

Scambio **ex russa** e **mature** per **moglie** e **parenti**

Scambio **mia compagna** con altri a cui piace mostrare la **propria donna**

Scambio **teen** nuda con insta per altre **teen** nude con insta

scambio **teen** , non mando per primo scrivetemi (preferibilmente mega

Scambio video della mia **ex** e **pedo** scrivetemi

Scambio video **minorenni**

07/08 ecc che si **segano** su foto **ped** ? In videochiamata

Cerco le foto delle **donne** o **ragazze** in leggings o in jaans x **tributo** !!! Magari avete qualche **parente** o **mamma**

Cerco **p3d** gay

Chi mi fa **segare** su **amica/ fidanzata**? Sto per venire un aiutino?

Chi mi fa **segare** su sua **sorella** oppure **fidanzata**

commento

mamme zie
cugine e amiche

COMMENTO
PESANTEMENTE

AMICHE,
PARENTI O
mogli, solo SE
AVETE FOTO
NUDe. **SEGO**
CON DOPPIO
DISPOSITIVO.

COMMENTO
RAGAZZE ED
EX, SCRIVIMI
O AGGIUNGIMI,
ANCHE IN
SEGRETA

Esco cazzone
e **sborro** per
stupri

ho circa 8000
video **ped-** se
volete scrivete mi,
mandatemi
qualche video voi
direttamente e il
vi mando circa 50
video

Qualche
padre che mi
fa **segare** sulla
propria **figlia?**

SCAMBIO EX
VERA SOLO PER
EX O FIDA REAL
(porcellina 05)

Scambio spy

SCAMBIO
TEEN
SCRIVETEMI

Cerco
06/07/08/09 ita
che lo succhiano.
Scrivetemi

CERCO
FOTO/VIDEO
05/06/07 F
ESCO IL CAZZO
O **MANDO**
FOTO DI UNA
TROIETTA IN
INTIMO

CERCO
RAGAZZINE
E **RAGAZZINI**
HO CAZZONE
ENORME

Cerco spy
in spogliatoio
scambio bene

Chi **ha pedo**

Chi **ha stupri**

Chi ha voglia
di **mostrare** la
sua **fidanzata**
o **moglie???**
Commento e **sego**

Chi
mi **mostra**
sua **mamma**
sorella (anche
per **parlare**
tranquillamente)
oppure anche
commentando
violentemente

Chi mi **mostra**
07-08?

Chi
mostra sorella o
amiche?

Chi **scambia**
ragazze 06/05/04?
Scrivetemi

CHI **SCAMBIA**
TIPE CULONE
O **TETTONE**
INSTAGRAM E
SBORRIAMO?

Chi **scambia**
video di **ragazzi**
che si **segano?**

Chi
tributa amica
07 con doppio
dispositivo? No
nudes (mando
Nick insta)

Chi vuole farsi
commentare
mamma zia ex
sorella cugina
moglie?

Commento le
vostre troie e mi
ci **sego** forte

ho foto
Spy di mia **sorella**
02(scrivete mi solo
se avete lo stesso)

Ho video di
ragazzine che
pisciano, scambio

solo per lo stesso,
non mando per
primo e non
scambio se non è
ciò che chiedo

Mostro
mia **moglie**
come gode... In
cambio fatemi
sborrare sulle
vostre **amiche** o
fidanzate o **mogli**

Qualcuno che mi
fa **sborrare** su
sua **fidanzata, ex,**
amica?

scambio
foto di **ragazze**
per lo stesso in
costume/intimo/
nudo scrivete mi!!!

Scambio
immagini di **teen**
nude in cambio di
video **ped**

Scambio
moglie reale
solo in segreta
scrivetemi

Scambio
TIPA nuda con
insta per nudi e
insta di altre **tipe**

Scambio
Spy fatti alla mia
famiglia chi vuole
mi cerchi **scambio**
solo con roba rara

di qualsiasi tipo

Scambio
video **teen** rari

Tributo o **sego**
in Cam vostre
amiche sorelle
e **fidanzate.**
Scrivetemi solo se
avete nudi

Bull **cerca** cornuto
per **segare** la
ragazza,madre,
sorella,zia o
amica

e **scambio spy** di
vostre **amiche** o
altre **troie** sono
limitato, no nudes.
Foto 18esimi
o altre feste.
Tributo foto **spy**

CERCO
MAMME,
SCAMBIO VIDEO
DELLE **TETTONE**
DI **MIA SORELLA**
. SONO LIMITATO
AGGIUNGETEMI
!!!!!!!!!!!!

padre che scambi
foto della **figlia**
sotto i dodici anni
scrivetemi SONO
LIMITATO

Cerco video
foto 04 05 06

Chi **commenta**
o **sega** mia **sorella**
mi scrive in privato

Chi di Napoli
zona Chiaia
Posillipo Vomero
per **commentare**
amiche?

Chi **ha stupri**
seri su bianche

Chi **ha** teen
gay?

Chi mi fa
sborrare cn foto
o video **moglie** o
ragazza in privato?

chi mi
fa **segare** sulla
ragazza/migliore
amica?

Chi mi
regala video di
minorenni? I
video li **commento**
anche

Chi **mostra**
foto **amiche** e
fidanzata in
segreta mente le
sego in cam

Chi **mostra**
la **sua tipa** per
commenti?

Chi **mostra**
moglie o **mamma**
da **commentare**
pesantemente in
pvt

ciao
scambio foto
con la mia **ex** se
mandi prima tu
una foto normale
della tua **ex** o
ragazza attuale

Commento
mamme sorelle zie

Commento
ragazzine e
ragazze di
qualsiasi età, sia
vestite che no, sia
chat segreta e
sia chat normale,
scrivetemi voi o
aggiungetem

Commento
ragazzine under
14

Mando me
con la **mia tipa,**
non **mando**
per primo, sono
limitato

Maturo
commento le
vostre **ragazze** in
chiamata audio ...
scrivetemi sono
limitato 😊

Pisello
famose,
fidanzate, ex,
cugine, amiche e
sorelle

Scambio foto
della mia **ex**

Scambio
mamma

Scambio
nudes di **ex** e insta

Scambio pedo
gay solo con lo
stesso

scambio **sorella**
e **amica** per
11/12/13enne

Scambio
stupri per **stupri**

scambio **teen**
nude con insta
per lo stesso o **ex,**
fidanzate, parenti
SONO LIMITATO

tributo con
secondo
dispositivo

Cerco e
scambio pd gay,
scrivetemi voi!

Cerco f
2008 2007 2006
Scrivetemi in priv
Sono limitato

Cerco
pedo in scambio di
fighe e loro Nick

Cerco **ragazze**
06/07/08 sono 06

🔍 **Cerco** si video chi li a mi contattasse ho tanta roba video rarissimi video di **ragazze** Napoli Roma Torino Venezia spezia ecc

🔍 **Cerco** video di **minorenni** **ricambio** bene

🔍 **cerc**o video di **pompini** video **05-06** scambio bene scrivete

🔍 **CERCO** VIDEO **MINORENNI** ✨ SCRIVETEMI GRAZIE

🔍 **Cerco**, sono strapieno di mega e **teen** da **mandare**

🔍 **Cerco** **06/07/08/09** ita **che lo succhiano**. Scrivetemi

🔍 Chi **commenta** **amica**

🔍 Chi **commenta** **amica** con timer? Scrivete direttamente in segreta che sono limitato

🔍🔍🔍🔍 Chi è disposto a farmi **sborrare**

su **fidanzata/ex/ amica/conoscenti** verrà **ricambiato** molto bene

🔍 Chi **fa** **cum tribute** con secondo dispositivo sulla **mia ragazza?**

🔍🔍🔍 Chi **manda** foto di **amiche/sorelle/ fidanzate** per **sega?** Anche vestite

🔍 Chi mi fa **commentare** sua **madre?**

🔍🔍 Chi mi fa **segare** anche in segreta su sua **ex** o **ragazza?**

🔍 Chi mi fa **segare ex** fortissimo? Sono serio con chat segreta

🔍 Chi mi fa **segare fidanzata** o **moglie**

🔍 Chi mi fa **segare** la sua **fidanzata**

🔍 Chi mi fa **segare** la sua **fidanzata** e mi guarda in videochiamata? Possibilmente

con foto dove si vedono le piante dei piedi

🔍🔍🔍🔍 Chi mi fa **segare** su **sorella fidanzata moglie madre** o **cugina** mi scriva

🔍 Chi mi fa **segare** sulla sua **ragazza/moglie** mi scriva

🔍 CHI MI **TRIBUTA** LA MIA **EX FREGNA**

🔍 Chi **mostra** la **madre** troia?

🔍🔍🔍🔍🔍 chi **mostra** **ragazza/ex/ sorella?** **scambio** mega **teen/pd**

🔍 Chi per **sega** in cam mentre **scambiamo** le **nostre ragazze**

🔍 Chi **scambia** **ragazze** di Catania mi scriva per scambiare nudes

🔍 Chi **scambia** video **teen** (05-06) scopate? Non mando per primo.

🔍 CHI SI FA **SEGARE** LA **MADRE?**

🔍 Chi si fa una **sborrata** su mia **amica** no nudes

🔍 Chi **tributa** **amica** in bikini su tablet seriamente?

🔍🔍🔍 **Commento** come un porco tua **mogli/figlia/ sorella**

🔍 **commento** e mi **sego** su **mammine** in foto mentre allattano

🔍🔍 **Commento** foto **ex** o **fidanzate** con timer, faccio anche audi e mando foto mentre mi **sego** per loro. Scrivetemi o aggiungetemi

🔍 **Commento** le **vostre troie** con audio..solo nude e porche

🔍🔍 **Commento** **mamme mogli**

🔍🔍🔍🔍 **Commento** **sorelline, fidanzatine** o **figlie** **06 07 08 09**, scrivetemi voi

🔍 Cornuto

si fa **segare** e **sputtanare** la **tipa**

🔍🔍 **Do** 500 video a chi mi prende il pass di clash (5€) i video sono **milf** e **20enni** e do subito 200 video oer far vedere che non scammo

🔍 **Ho Spy**. Scrivetemi

🔍 **Mando** foto **amica** vestita o costume no nudes in cambio di parere

🔍🔍 **Mando** video **ragazzina** ubriaca e usata a chi **mette il cazzo** su foto di mie **amiche** con secondo dispositivo

🔍 NESSUNO MI FA **SBORRARE** LA **MOGLIE** O **FIDA**

🔍 QUALCUNO **MOSTRA** IN CAM SUA **MOGLIE** MENTRE DORME?

🔍 qualcuno **scambia** seriamente la **propria tipa?** o tutti fake?

🔍 **Scambio ex**

ed inediti italiani per lo stesso tipo di roba, solo gente seria e con roba nuova.

🔍 **Scambio ex** reale in segreta

🔍🔍🔍 **Scambio** foto in intimo e nuda della mia **sorellastra** 19 anni per **milf mogli** o **ex...** scrivetemi sono limitato

🔍 **Scambio** foto **spy**

🔍 **Scambio** la mia **ex** per altra **ex**

🔍🔍 **scambio** mia **sorellina** **2008** per lo stesso

🔍 **scambio** **ragazza attuale** solo per lo stesso.. gente seria!

🔍🔍 **SCAMBIO** **SPY SORELLA** PER **SPY**

🔍🔍 **Scambio** **teen** amatoriali e **pedo** scrivetemi

🔍 **Scambio** **teen** gay

🔍 **SCAMBIO** **TIPE** IN COSTUME

E VESTITE PROVOCANTI PER LO STESSO E **SBORRIAMO** UN BOTTO CONTATTATEMIII

🔍 **Scambio** video **\$tu**

🔍 **SCAMBIO** VIDEO DI MIA **SORELLA** CHE SI MASTURBA IN VASCA

🔍🔍🔍 **Scambio** solo con **minorenni** che si masturbano una mia **ex minorenn**e che si masturba e un'altra **ragazza** che si tocca

🔍 **SCAMBIO** VIDEO **TEEN** **CICCIONE**

🔍 **Sego** e **commento** **ragazzine** Più piccole sono e più mi eccitano

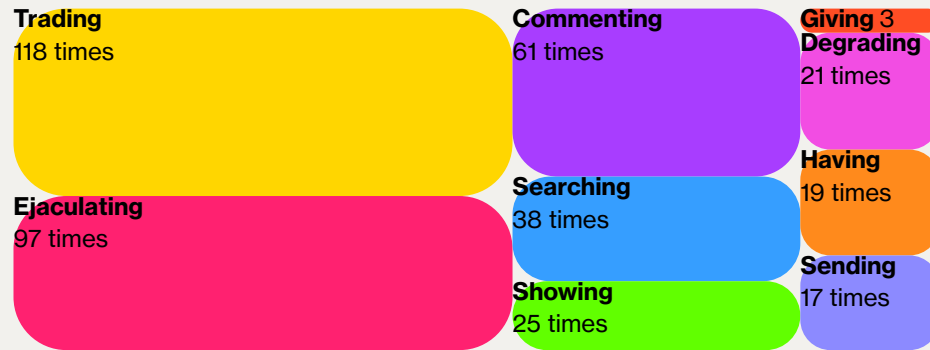
🔍🔍 **SEGQ** IN CAM INSIEME ADESSO SU VOSTRE **AMICHE, RAGAZZE** **MOGLI** SCRIVIMI

🔍🔍 **SPUTTANO** MIA **MADRE** TRADISCE HO

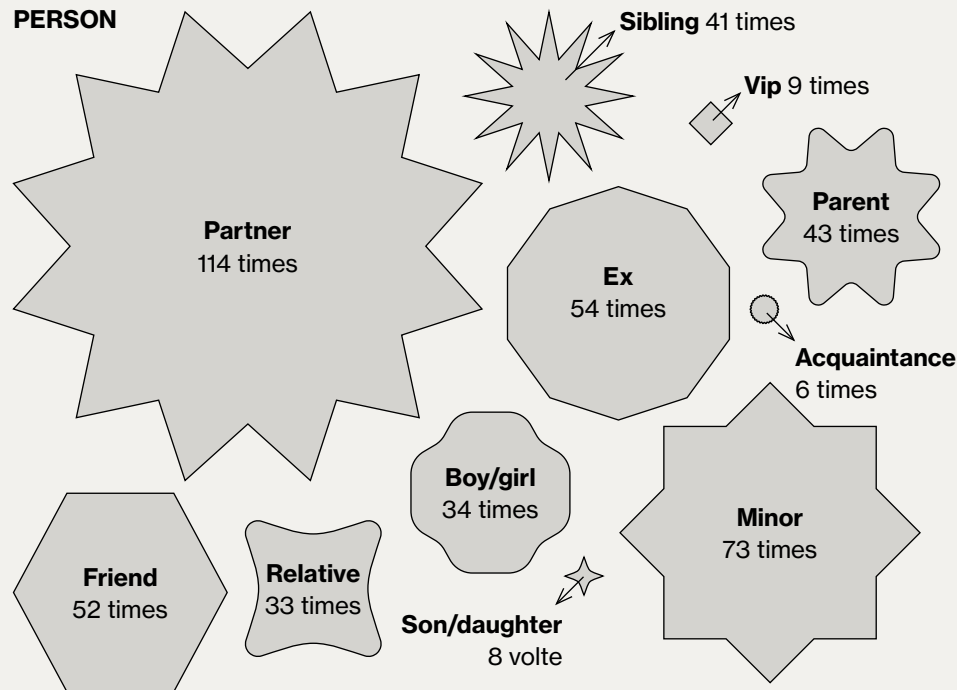
SPY SCRIVETEMI VOIIII!

🔍 **Tributo** **ragazze**

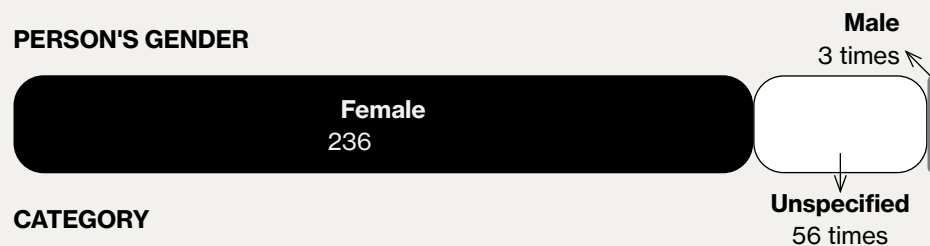
ACTION



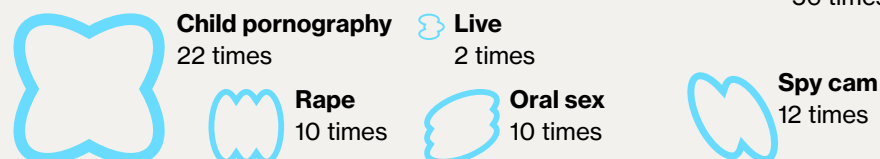
PERSON



PERSON'S GENDER



CATEGORY



2.4 Conclusions: What Emerges from the Findings

Before moving on to talk about the project, it is important to take stock of the situation. From the conducted research, some common evidence emerges that cannot be ignored. First of all, almost all of the material that is spread or created concerns women: women are always at the centre of the discourse, with violent, derogatory, and abusive comments. If we think about what was said in Chapter 1, but also about previous research on image-based sexual abuse, Telegram and 4chan, this gives us empirical evidence that the majority of those leading the discourse are male.

Secondly, one of the most important findings, related to what the research aimed to explore, is that many other forms of image-based sexual abuse are also practised, beyond the more studied non-consensual sharing of private sexual material. These practices are equally violent and pervasive and it would be worth continuing their study beyond this thesis.

In addition, Telegram and 4chan are platforms that allow for a great sense of community among people who share the same interest, even if that interest is the humiliation of women. Both platforms are characterized by a sense of solidarity evident already in the use of formulating requests thinking that someone else will respond. Both the Telegram and 4chan pornographic subcultures require users to have knowledge of practices and vernaculars used that contribute to the creation of this sense of community and, instead, the exclusion of those who do not know how to use them.

Finally, it is worth noting the differences between what happens on 4chan and what happens on Telegram based on the affordances of the platform. In fact, while 4chan has a concise vernacular full of neologisms, since a user is required to be as specific as possible to be considered in a completely public space where it is impossible to know who wrote what, on Telegram, where it is possible to leave the group to start private conversations, the request may be less concise—although equally specific in detailing actions and subjects—because it is mainly aimed at exchanging and establishing a dialogue with the other person.

← Fig. 24 Summary visualisation of the number of repetitions within the requests for each element of the categories.



Chapter 3

**A Digital Space
to Inform About
Image-Based
Sexual Abuse**

This chapter describes “*Non sono solo immagini*” (It’s Not Just Images), the project developed based on the results of the research conducted in the thesis. It begins by defining the project goals determined during the ideation phase (3.1), continues with a reflection on the ethics of online amplification – giving visibility to controversial and/or violent content – (3.2), also through the analysis of three virtuous case studies (3.2.1), and goes on to analyze the two project methodologies that were fundamental in creating “*Non sono solo immagini*” (3.3). Finally, in the last section (3.4), the project is presented, providing an overview that starts from the design choices and concludes by showing and describing the complete website.

3.1 Project Objectives

Having defined and contextualised the phenomenon of image-based sexual abuse in chapter 1 and conducted research on the vernacular language used to perpetrate it online in chapter 2, it is time to consider how to communicate the results obtained, or, more precisely, design a way to visualize and communicate them.

The design process must start from objectives that, in this case, have been identified based on the observations made in the previous chapters. Firstly, in 1.9.1, gaps in Italian media communication on image-based sexual abuse were noted, such as the tendency to sensationalize the narrative and focus on the victim, while failing to respect their experience and pain; while in 1.9.2, the perspective of the Italian public opinion on image-based sexual abuse was highlighted, which tends to blame the victim and downplay the violence they have experienced. Secondly, in 2.2, unexplored opportunities were found in research on online vernacular and image-based sexual abuse, which provided a starting point for the research carried out in the thesis. This latter research uncovered novel or little-explored practices and analyzed the characteristics of the language used to perpetrate it, highlighting, ultimately, that image-based sexual abuse, despite its violence, is acted out daily and casually within online communities in which it occurs.

The main intention of the project is, therefore, to shift the focus from victims to perpetrators of image-based sexual abuse, by displaying and investigating the vernacular language used in online communication. In this way, two additional objectives are achieved: shedding light on all those practices of image-based sexual abuse still unknown to most people and making visible how they are justified and even normalized within the communities where they occur. In summary, the purpose of the project is to inform and, above all, to clearly define the characteristics of image-based sexual abuse through the vernacular language used to perpetrate it. The analysis of abusers’ vernacular language not only provides a tool to explore the practices of image-based sexual abuse, but also reveals its violence through the observation of its vulgar, aggressive, and denigrating language aimed at dehumanizing the victims. Thus, it is believed that the fallacy of narratives that tend to reduce IBSA to “minor violence” – not as dangerous or harmful as other forms of physical violence – or to a prank played by young people, relying on the rhetoric of “**he didn’t really rape her**” (cf. Fairbairn 2015: 235)

and “it’s just images” (see 1.1) can be made clear.

Finally, by exposing the violence of the language of image-based sexual abuse, it is possible to dismantle another stereotype often relied upon by popular rhetoric that attributes responsibility to the victim, guilty of having shared their intimate images, and move towards an alternative form of narration that puts the perpetrator at the centre of attention.

3.2 To Amplify or Not To Amplify: the Amplification of Aggressive Online Behavior

Before moving on, it is necessary to reflect on what the project intends to do, namely to expose violent practices through the denigrating and aggressive language used to spread them, thereby bringing them out of the communities—unknown to most—in which they are practised. Exposing image-based sexual abuse is certainly a risky operation, in fact, even via its denunciation, there is a danger of *amplifying* it, that is, attracting attention to it and not only soliciting critical reactions, but also curiosity or, worse, cases of imitation.

The issue of amplification was addressed by Phillips and Milner (2017), who questioned the opportunity to report the practices and sometimes even the expressions used by users in online communities with another presence of antagonism, due to the risks of amplification. According to the authors, there is no clear answer - amplifying is not only wrong or only right - as different factors often contradict each other. Amplifying obviously means increasing the resonance of aggressive language and violent behaviour, however, many times it is necessary to initiate criticism and discussions about the practices themselves, which are the first step towards their eradication. Not talking about them, on the other hand, risks becoming a sign of complicity. However, there remains the underlying risk of normalizing non-egalitarian structures, prejudices, and identity-based antagonisms, because it contributes to their circulation (cf. Phillips, Milner 2017: 29).

A questo proposito, Phillips e Milner hanno utilizzato come esempio in this regard, Phillips and Milner used as an example the media coverage of the case of racist and misogynistic online harassment and the dissemination of private sexual material that victimized actress Leslie Jones in 2016 following

the hacking of her website. The media’s attention to the episode and the way it was narrated, although critical, not only perpetuated racist and misogynistic imagery, prolonging the harassment, but also contributed to attracting readers to Jones’ site - where abusers shared images - thus offering them a wider audience. Therefore, the Jones case is an excellent example of ethical questions about whether and how to interact with explicitly aggressive online content:

Shining a light on cultural problems, such as the violent misogyny and virulent racism animating the Jones harassment case, is often the only way to affect awareness; sometimes, not speaking up is worse, since silence risks signaling complicity. But by engaging with vernacular ambivalence online, one is always on the precipice of amplifying ugliness, even inadvertently. On the other hand, by not engaging with vernacular ambivalence online, particularly when the stakes are as high as in the Jones case, one risks extinguishing important critiques, which can only spread if their audiences give them life. (Phillips, Milner 2017: 56)

Following her research in 2018, Phillips herself published a report in which, based on interviews with various journalists, she drew up a series of considerations on the problematic aspects of reporting or not reporting harmful information, aggressive behaviours, and violent language. Among the major risks listed, considering the scope of the thesis project, there are possibilities:

- ✦ To increase violence or that similar methods are used to carry it out.
- ✦ To make the communities where the violence occurs and the actors who carry it out more visible and influential than they would have been otherwise.
- ✦ To normalize and desensitize users/the public to harmful views.
- ✦ To flatten more complex conversations.

On the other hand, not amplifying this information, behaviour or language also entails several risks, such as:

- ✦ Letting others who are less competent on the subject spe-

ak about it.

- ✦ Missing an opportunity to educate the public/users.
- ✦ Reducing violent practices to abstract concepts, rather than lived experiences.
- ✦ Allowing a harmful ideology to flourish unchallenged.

But above all, “[d]oesn’t mean that the issue, whatever it is, will go away” (Phillips 2018: 7).

Even in choosing whether or not to amplify vernacular language related to image-based sexual abuse online, there is no unique solution and many of the risks listed above are at stake. Therefore, following the research results, we tried to take into account the main dangers related to the spread of such language. Of course, since we are talking about the project that was carried out, the idea of not talking about image-based sexual abuse to avoid risking the amplification of abusive behaviours related to the phenomenon was discarded.

Indeed, there is a greater danger in not reporting the violent behaviour and aggressive and denigrating language analyzed, considering instead an excellent opportunity to expose such practices to initiate a critical discussion aimed at their eradication. In addition, it has been equally important to be able to serve as an alternative source of information to the mass media, which often treat the phenomenon in erroneous and sensationalistic terms (see 1.9.1), neglecting its nuances and putting the perpetrators in the background.

Therefore, in the design phase, efforts were made to limit the potential negative repercussions of amplifying the language of image-based sexual abuse online. First of all, although literally reported, the requests of users from /r/ and Telegram with their terminology were introduced by contextualizing and referring to essential but correct notions about image-based sexual abuse, online vernacular, and the analyzed platforms. Finally, efforts were made to give the project's users as few tools as possible to track down the communities where these forms of violence are being carried out: the /r/ board of 4chan is public and easily accessible, but the names of the Telegram groups analyzed were avoided in order to make them at least difficult to find.

Only after these reflections and with the awareness of circulating violent, denigrating, and dehumanizing expressions, behaviours, and viewpoints, did the project continue.

“There's bad people in the world, and there are poisonous ideologies in the world, and at a certain point you have to realize that you're [...] not promoting them, but you're getting those ideas out to a wider audience.”

(Phillips 2018: part 2, 7)

3.2.1 Amplifying to Eradicate: Case Studies

A search for case studies that could inspire the design process has begun. Three were identified for their approach to narrating violent and abusive behaviour, and for their analysis based on the words of abusers or victims.

The first case study is that of “Catcalls of NYC,” a social campaign aimed at raising awareness about the phenomenon of catcalling.⁵⁶ Activists involved in this project collect testimonies from victims of street harassment and rewrite the words of their aggressors on New York sidewalks with coloured chalk, accompanied by the hashtags #catcallsNYC and #stopstreetharassment, before photographing the works and posting them on their Instagram page (fig. 25). This initiative has been so successful that it has inspired several activist groups in different cities around the world to imitate it. The strength of “Catcalls of NYC” lies in the

⁵⁶ Catcalling is a form of street harassment that mainly consists of sexual harassment, unwanted comments, gestures, honking, whistling, following, persistent sexual advances, and groping by strangers.

↓ Fig. 25
Collection of some of the images published on the “Catcalls of NYC” Instagram page.



↑ Fig. 26
Collection of some of the images posted on the Instagram page of “Why I Didn't Report.”

simple and direct means it uses to share victims' stories and promote cultural change. Moreover, transcribing the exact words of the harassers on sidewalks brings them back into what is, in a sense, their natural environment, exposing them at the same time to a wider audience, making their aggression evident and contributing effectively and directly to educating and raising awareness about this phenomenon. “Catcalls of NYC” is certainly the most suitable case study to demonstrate that amplifying violent and offensive language and behaviour, if done correctly, can be a very effective weapon in combating them. Furthermore, it is particularly relevant to the design idea, which is based on shifting the focus from victims to perpetrators.

The second case study, like the first, is a social media campaign conducted through Instagram, via the profile “Why I Didn't Report” (fig. 26) and the corresponding hashtag #whyididntreport, aimed at raising awareness about sexual

violence and, above all, the reasons why victims do not report it. The goal is achieved through a simple and direct but emotionally impactful format. In fact, survivors themselves tell their stories by writing them on sheets of paper bearing the project's name, which are then photographed and sent to the Instagram page privately or shared through the dedicated hashtag so that the images can be collected and re-shared. "Why I Didn't Report" is a support platform for survivors of sexual violence and a virtuous example of how the narration of pain can also become a therapeutic tool. In addition, a great strength of the project is how it gives voice to the victims: they themselves decide to participate and choose how to tell their story, contributing firsthand to fighting their own cause and increasing awareness about sexual violence and the ineffectiveness of the legal and social system that often pushes them to give up pursuing their aggressors. By amplifying the brutal and painful stories of survivors, the project demonstrates that there is a way to sensitize—but also move—the public without resorting to sensationalistic narratives and that it achieves its goal of social denunciation, showing directly and effectively the gaps in a system that often further brutalizes victims.

The third and final project analyzed is "It's Not Violent" (fig. 27), a website created by SOS violence conjugale, an association active in Quebec that aims to raise awareness about domestic violence and support its victims. The site is composed of several parts, of which the most important and impactful is an interactive experience: the user can experience different scenarios of domestic violence by interacting in a fictitious chat with an abusive partner. The experience aims to teach how to recognize the different forms of abuse by intimate partners, such as gaslighting, manipulation, or psychological violence. Each of these fictitious chats concludes by asking the user if they considered the conversation violent, and then explaining the reasons why it should be considered as such. The remaining sections of the site consist of a guide to the project and a list of numbers, websites, emails, or channels to seek help. "It's Not Violent" is an interesting case study because it shows how perpetrators of domestic violence act, providing a concrete example for potential victims who may still be unaware. In this sense, it demonstrates how using the language and showing the methods of abusers can be a concrete resource for education and awareness-raising. In addition, the graphic choices are interesting: the visual language used on the site is friendly and uses bright colours and illustrations that do not clash with the purpose for which it was created but, on the contrary, stimulate the target au-

dience (people between 15 and 25 years old) to interact with educational experiences.

In conclusion, all three cases are examples of possible ways to amplify certain practices and certain discourses in a respectful manner towards victims but also educational for those who need to be informed. In all cases, the solution was reached by correctly using the words of abusers or victims—or both, as in "It's Not Violent"—which is what will be sought in the thesis project.

↓ Fig. 27
Collection of screenshots from the website "It's Not Violent."



3.3 Method

Before delving into the heart of the project, it is necessary to discuss one last topic, namely the methodologies used in the ideation and creation process. Therefore, below, we will proceed to illustrate the two methods that have been particularly referred to and the reason why they were fundamental in the design phase.

3.3.1 Adversarial Design

In his 2012 book, Carl DiSalvo states:

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been an increased interest in how the practices and products of design shape and contribute to public discourse and civic life. (DiSalvo 2012: 3)

Following this interest, the author conceptualized a design methodology called *adversarial design*. DiSalvo establishes that design — understood in an interdisciplinary sense, not only as a design profession but also as a set of practices related to the construction of visual and material environments — can be political if it expresses or enables a particular political perspective known as agonism. In political theory, agonism identifies the inherently controversial basis of democracy: “[a]gonism is a condition of disagreement and confrontation — a condition of contestation and dissensus.” (DiSalvo 2012: 4). For democracy to thrive, there must be spaces of confrontation, and DiSalvo asserts that the purpose of adversarial design is precisely to design such spaces and provide people with tools and opportunities to participate in them. Therefore, adversarial design operates like agonism, in the sense that the artefacts that are designed can prompt the recognition of political relationships and issues, express dissent, and allow for contentious claims and arguments.

One of the many case studies that DiSalvo analyzes in his book is “State-Machine: Agency,” a digital project that displays the relationships between United States senators and their campaign financiers. Based on DiSalvo’s previous publication (2009), it can be said that this website uses a specific design tactic aimed at exposing and raising awareness about a problem so that a public can be formed: tracking. Tracking is a technique for constructing a public that involves following and recording the presence and movement of an artefact, an event, or an idea, and revealing and exposing the underlying

3. A Digital Space to Inform About Image-Based Sexual Abuse

structures, arguments, and hypotheses. In this sense, a project that uses tracking aims to build controversy by presenting the “state of the art” of a situation, artefact, idea, or controversial event so that a discussion can arise.

However, case studies like “State-Machine: Agency” also have another typical characteristic of adversarial design: they expose and document associations in the construction, maintenance, and exercise of influence in contemporary society; they are engaged in revealing hegemony. In DiSalvo’s words, hegemony is the set of ways in which one group develops dominance over another group through social manipulation manoeuvres that allow the dominant group to obtain implicit consent from the subordinate group. Hegemony is a flexible network of related factors, actions, and intentions, so the effort to overcome it must be found in the discussion of hegemonic practices. Revealing hegemony is, therefore, a tactic for exposing and documenting forces of influence in society and the means by which social manipulation occurs so that they can be examined, discussed, and criticized (cf. DiSalvo 2012: 35).

Image-based sexual abuse has social and cultural roots in some hegemonic structures of society, such as the dominance of males over females, also enacted through sexual violence. In this sense, IBSA is yet another means of maintaining such dominance, as demonstrated by aspects of the language used to perpetrate it, which aim to denigrate and dehumanize victims. Consequently, the thesis project uses adversarial design and the tracking tactic to draw attention to image-based sexual abuse by exposing one of the underlying structures, the language of perpetrators, which has the potential to become a key to recognizing and interpreting others. However, it does not intend to be a project in which a unique solution is provided, as such a solution can only arise from the discussion; it aims to create a space in which it is possible to find tools to argue the dialogue and, consequently, to counter the phenomenon.

3.3.2 Design è Traduzione

In recent years, thanks mainly to the contribution of Baule and Caratti (2016), the common aspects shared by design, particularly communication design, and translation have been studied. Indeed, there has been a turning point in translation studies that has highlighted its intercultural nature. Today it is commonly understood that translation concerns cultures more than languages. As an act of communication that takes place between cultures, the idea of translation also applies to

[...] tradurre vuol dire rendere accessibili i contenuti di un processo di comunicazione, individuando la forma di espressione più pertinente per un nuovo medium [...].

(Baule, Caratti 2016: 27)

Tr. en.: “[...] translating means making the contents of a communication process accessible, identifying the most relevant form of expression for a new medium [...].”

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the field of design, as many transitions between different cultures, such as visual or digital cultures, can be recognized as translational passages (cf. Baule, Caratti 2016: 18). Therefore:

Il Design è Traduzione. Lo è da sempre, nel profondo delle sue pratiche, dei suoi metodi e delle sue teorie; così come il principio traduttivo è alla radice delle culture del progetto. Il Design è Traduzione perché, nei propri processi progettuali, rivela molteplici passaggi traduttivi: da funzioni a forme, da contenuti a espressioni, da linguaggio a linguaggio, da tecnica a tecnica, da supporto a supporto...⁵⁷ (Baule, Caratti 2016: 271)

In addition, there are aspects of design that allow for more ethical implementation of “translation” in its deepest sense of remedying, helping to understand, revise, and educate in order to produce social transformation and innovation (cf. Baule, Caratti 2016: 24):

[i]nsieme alla Traduzione, anche il Design è educazione alla differenza. Procedo per opzioni e passaggi di culture, lavoro per la tolleranza e l’inclusione. [...] Il designer opera come mediatore tra culture, competenze, tecniche, linguaggi.⁵⁸ (Baule, Caratti 2016: 272).

The design, like translation, is often interdisciplinary, working at the intersection of various subjects, as is evident in the project of this thesis, which uses communication design as a tool to visualize violence that has a social and cultural origin. To make this process possible, and thus educate and raise awareness among the user with the intention of producing a social transformation and innovation, the users themselves must be at the centre of the process: this is another point in common between design and translation, where the user is the “other” subject who is distinct from the translator.

The project presented in the thesis was built according to this translational sensitivity: the process by which certain languages were explained and translated into colours, symbols, or, more generally, into the entire communicative artefact, is not separate from that of translation. The intention is, in fact, to present the vernacular online language of image-based sexual abuse in an interesting and informative way for the user, and this was possible only by translating the raw material that emerged from the research into a structured, organised, and easily readable and interpretable form. Finally, attention was also paid to the ethical aspect of translation for

⁵⁷ Tr. en.: “Design is Translation. It always has been, in the depths of its practices, methods, and theories; just as the translational principle is at the root of design cultures. Design is Translation because, in its own design processes, it reveals multiple translational steps: from functions to forms, from content to expressions, from language to language, from technique to technique, from medium to medium...”

⁵⁸ Tr. en.: “[t]ogether with Translation, Design is also education towards difference. It proceeds through options and passages of cultures, and works towards tolerance and inclusion. [...] The designer acts as a mediator between cultures, competencies, techniques, and languages.”

communicative choices, especially regarding gender cultures. In fact, in virtue of its being violence against women, image-based sexual abuse falls under a broader concept of gender construction and identity, so we tried not to communicate gender in a stereotyped and normative way, avoiding the communicative models used especially in communication design for it (e.g. pink for females, blue for males) as Bucchetti (2016) has discussed.

3.4 Non sono solo immagini: the Language Behind Image-Based Sexual Abuse

The chosen name for the project, “*Non sono solo immagini*” (It’s not just images), refers to two key concepts in the narrative: firstly, the fact that image-based sexual abuse is a phenomenon composed of multiple aspects, of which photographic or video material is only a part—certainly, the one through which violence is concretized—but which would not exist if not accompanied by a vernacular language that enables a sense of community and facilitates conversations between users and the spread of materials; therefore, “it’s not just images” because abuse is made possible by words as well. Secondly (see 1.1), image-based sexual abuse is often considered a form of insignificant violence precisely because it is perpetrated through images, and phrases like “**it’s just images**” are frequently used by those trying to minimize the extent of the abuse, so the expression “it’s not just images” reaffirms its concrete potential to harm the victim.

3.4.1 Target: Who Want to Change Their Point of View

“*Non sono solo immagini*” was created with the aim of educating and raising awareness about the issue of image-based sexual abuse. For this reason, its target audience is anyone who wants to learn about the phenomenon, even starting by searching for information on revenge porn—the only aspect of IBSA mentioned by the mass media—since the project space includes a critical introduction on the validity of such a term, before introducing the more correct image-based sexual abuse. However, with the clear intention of reporting the communications of perpetrators, the more specific target audience is not only those who wish to learn but also those who consider the victim to be at least partially responsible

or who do not consider image-based sexual abuse a real form of violence.

In fact, the main reason why we chose to show the dehumanizing cruelty of the conversations of those who commit image-based sexual abuse is to make it clear that the violence of these practices cannot and should not be diminished, as it is instead the product of a male chauvinistic culture still deeply rooted in society, which sees women as sexual objects to be freely disposed of, even with violent behaviours and aggressive language.

A part of this target could also coincide with those who actually participate in the communities where image-based sexual abuse is carried out, ideally “*Non sono solo immagini*” is also addressed to them. In fact, it is believed that shifting conversations around such practices to an unfamiliar environment, can encourage broader reflection aimed at recognizing the absurdity of such models considered normal in their communities.

Furthermore, this project is aimed at those who want to go beyond information and activate action that can contribute to eradicating image-based sexual abuse. In this sense, “*Non sono solo immagini*” should be considered a starting platform, where showing the variety and violence of image-based sexual abuse practices is only the starting point for a broader critique that can find space on other platforms.

Finally, the target of “*Non sono solo immagini*” is Italian. In fact, Italian was chosen for the project for two main reasons. The first, and most practical, depends on the fact that all the analysis carried out on Telegram (see 2.3.3, 2.3.4, 2.3.5) concerned some channels and groups that make up the Italian pornographic subculture, and on the other hand, given the level of anonymity, on 4chan it is impossible to deduce the nationality of users, considering especially that English is the most widespread language for certain types of communication on the internet. Secondly, an Italian audience was chosen because, as seen in 1.9.1, media communication of image-based sexual abuse in Italy is still incomplete and based on stereotypical and harmful narratives, while public opinion (see 1.9.2) often tends to condemn the victim and minimize the violence. Therefore, it was considered that the Italian audience could benefit from the shift of attention, which is among the project's objectives.

3.4.2 Medium: a Website that Collects Various Artefacts

The choice of medium was a consequence of the target audience. To reach such a wide range of users, it seemed natural to adopt a website as a communication artefact. Online spaces, accessible to the majority of the population at any time, allow for greater dissemination of content and simplify the possibility of use.

Furthermore, it is worth considering that image-based sexual abuse is a form of sexual violence that largely occurs on digital platforms. Therefore, it seemed natural for an online environment to discuss it. Another aspect that led to the choice of a digital space came from a reflection on the importance of warning users about the violent, denigrating, and vulgar material contained in the project. In fact, it was deemed essential to give people the choice of whether or not to proceed with viewing the content, because—given its nature—it could trigger strong emotional reactions in some who might recall past events and others may simply not want to be exposed to aggressive language. Digital artefacts, more than analogue ones—think of advertising campaigns—offer the opportunity to block the view of content through a warning window that alerts the user to what they are about to see.

Finally, the website medium offers the opportunity to be divided into sections that can be designed as standalone artefacts, which is exactly what was chosen to do in “*Non sono solo immagini*.” Although united by visual continuity, the sections dedicated to research carried out respectively on Telegram and 4chan can be considered distinct artefacts that take the form of a digital catalogue and glossary, designed with the project objectives in mind, but also taking into account the diversity of evidence emerging from the analyses.

3.4.3 Tone of voice

The tone of voice chosen for “*Non sono solo immagini*” is simple and direct, and particular attention was paid to keeping it technical and objective. In fact, even though the purpose of the project is clearly critical, it was chosen to present the research without providing a subjective interpretation to allow the user to form a personal opinion on the practices that occur within the communities where image-based sexual abuse is perpetrated. The design choice is therefore based more on a concept of “shift” than direct contestation. It was believed that the tone of language used by those who practice IBSA—vulgar, denigrating, aggressive, and dehumanizing—is

self-explanatory, so it was thought that placing it in a different space from the one where it was born and thrives daily would be enough to show its absurdity and violence.

Presenting these practices with a detached and objective tone of voice still intends to impact the user, on the one hand through the contrast between the accessible and calm language used to talk about it and the aggressiveness of the tones of those who commit image-based sexual abuse, and on the other hand, making them reflect on the alienation of the members of the communities where IBSA is practised, who participate in aggressive discussions and behaviours in a context that is daily and normalized for them but absurd and incomprehensible for others.

Since the target audience of “*Non sono solo immagini*” is Italian, the website is also in Italian. The use of this language was considered an opportunity not to be underestimated since some of the practices mentioned on 4chan—in English—are also named in Italian groups on Telegram (e.g., tribute, caption), so it was thought to be interesting to offer an overview of what happens on 4chan to an Italian user, as at least some of the people who practice image-based sexual abuse on Telegram are aware of it.

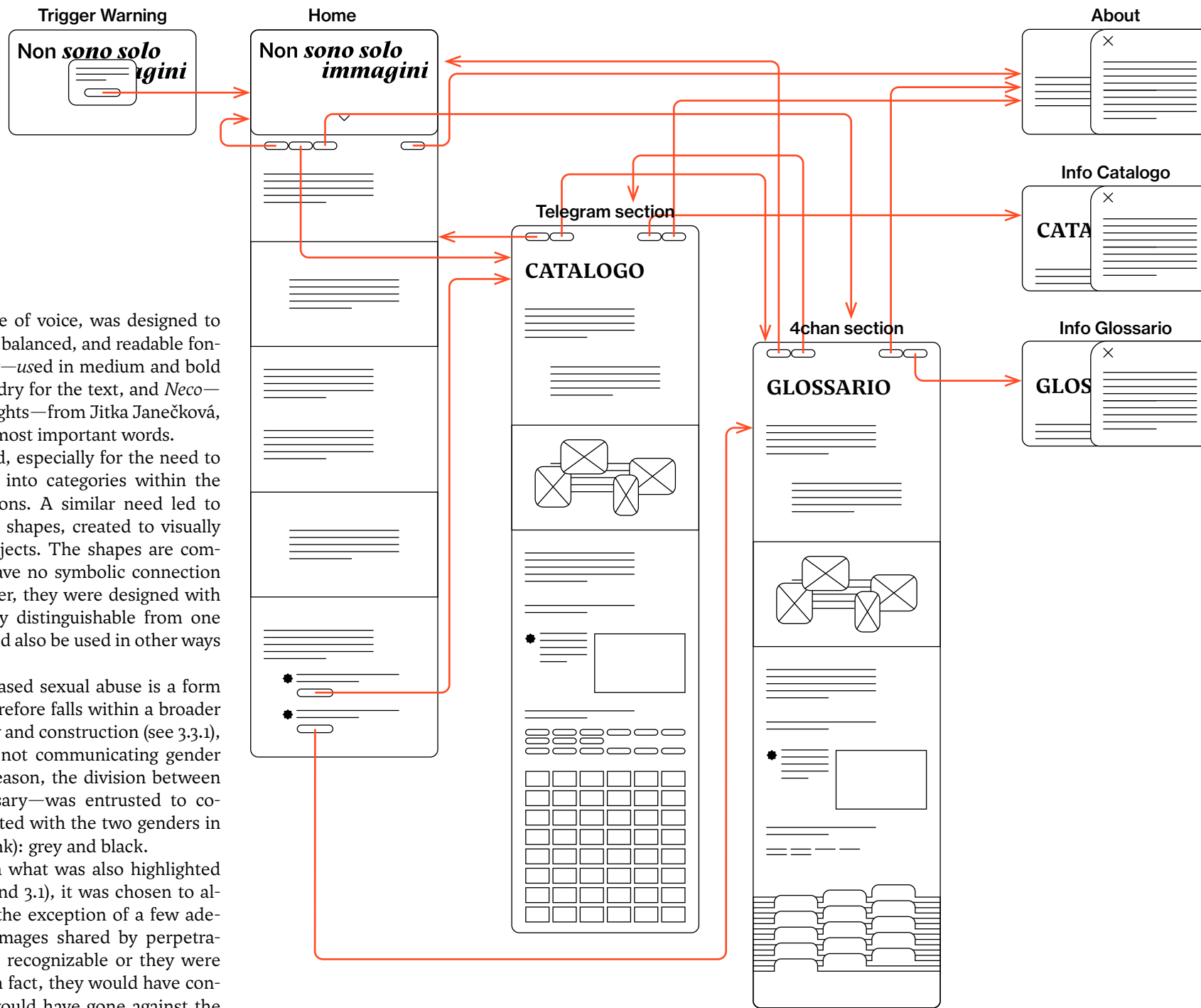
3.4.4 Structure

“*Non sono solo immagini*” consists of a homepage and two sections: “Catalogo” (Catalogue), which is on Telegram, and “Glossario” (Glossary), which is on 4chan. The homepage is linked to an about page on the project in general, while in the sections, links to more specific information pages on the conducted research can be found.

The structure (fig. 28) is designed to be a collection of the research carried out: therefore, the sections dedicated to the research are independent of each other and maintain their specific peculiarities, such as in the visualizations, becoming distinct artefacts.

In addition, the website is designed to be expandable: if additional sections were to be added following new research, all that would be needed is to add a link to that section at the bottom of the homepage and in the navigation bar.

→ Fig. 28
The structure of “Non sono solo immagini.”



3.4.5 Visual Language

The visual language, like the tone of voice, was designed to be simple and clear. Two neutral, balanced, and readable fonts were preferred: *Cabinet Grotesk*—used in medium and bold weights—from Indian Type Foundry for the text, and *Neco*—used in italic in bold and black weights—from Jitka Janečková, for the titles and to highlight the most important words.

Colours were widely used, especially for the need to communicate some subdivisions into categories within the “Catalogo” and “Glossario” sections. A similar need led to the design of different geometric shapes, created to visually distinguish different types of subjects. The shapes are completely abstract, meaning they have no symbolic connection to the subject they refer to. Rather, they were designed with the sole intention of being easily distinguishable from one another. For this reason, they could also be used in other ways within the narrative.

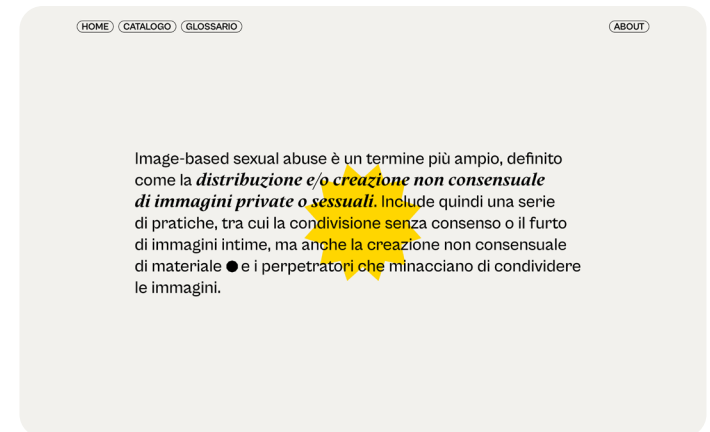
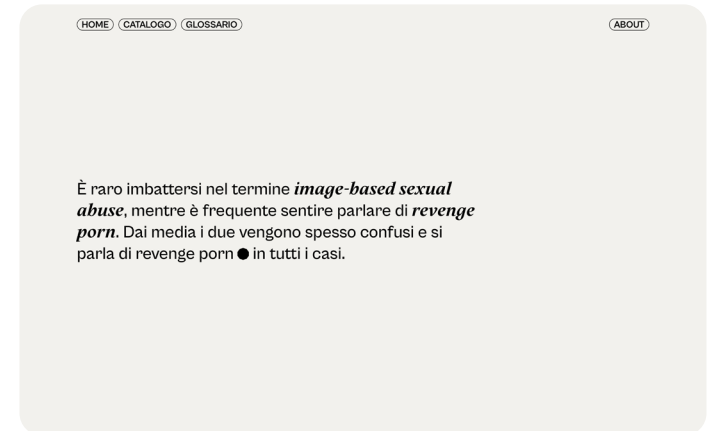
Moreover, since image-based sexual abuse is a form of gender-based violence and therefore falls within a broader social discourse of gender identity and construction (see 3.3.1), particular attention was paid to not communicating gender in a stereotypical way. For this reason, the division between male and female—where necessary—was entrusted to colours different from those associated with the two genders in the marketing world (blue and pink): grey and black.

Finally, consistently with what was also highlighted in other parts of the thesis (2.1 and 3.1), it was chosen to almost completely exclude—with the exception of a few adequately censored screenshots—images shared by perpetrators, even if the subject was not recognizable or they were used for explanatory purposes. In fact, they would have constituted abuse in any case and would have gone against the purpose of the thesis, for which the exclusive use of words to explain the terms and behaviours of online image-based sexual abuse was preferred.



← Fig. 29
The trigger warning window on the first screen of the home page.

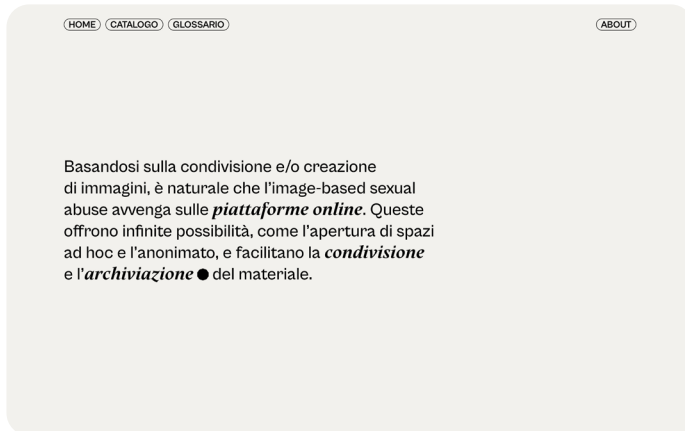
→ Fig. 30
The first two screens of the home page in which image-based sexual abuse is defined.



3.4.6 Home

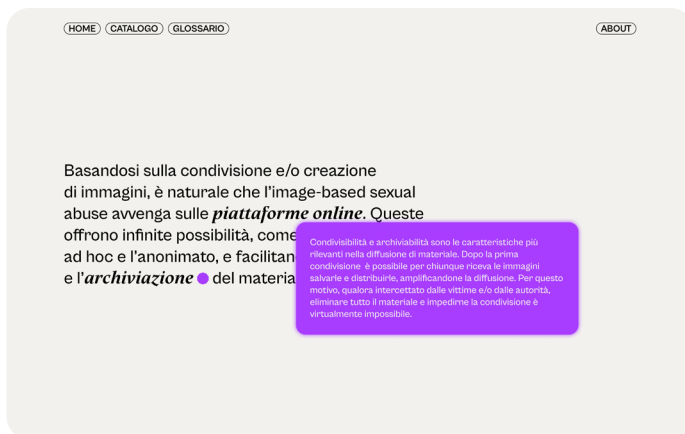
“Non sono solo immagini” opens with a trigger warning window (fig. 29) to alert users that the site will discuss sexual violence with vulgar, aggressive, and derogatory language, as the decision was made to use the very words of perpetrators of image-based sexual abuse. The decision to begin the site with a warning and not allow the user to proceed until they have acknowledged it by clicking the “continue” button was made believing that it is deeply important to inform people when they are about to read content that could trigger unpleasant memories or sensations. Therefore, it was deemed equally important to give users the option to choose whether or not to expose themselves to violent language, discourse, and behaviour.

Those who choose to continue on the website can



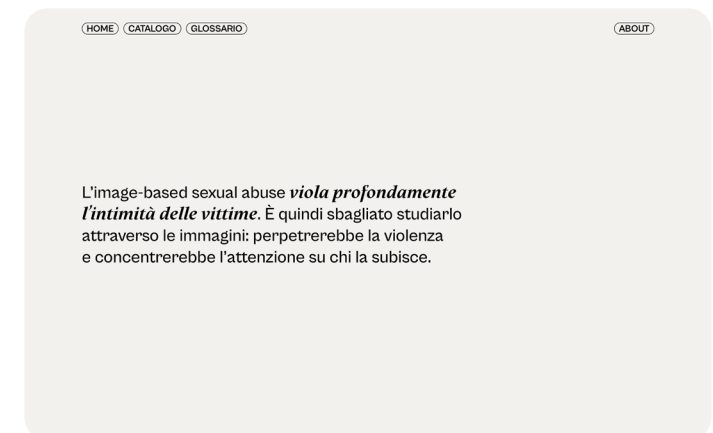
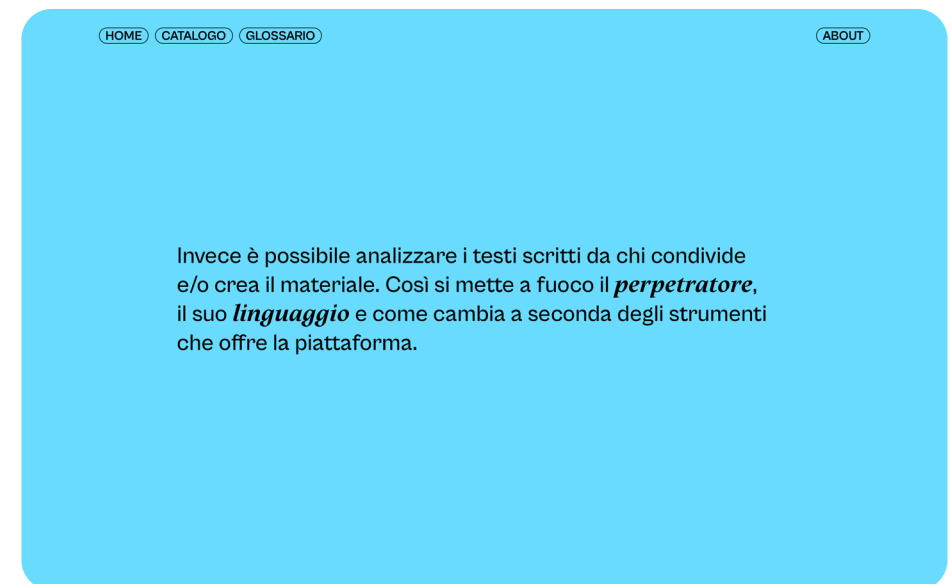
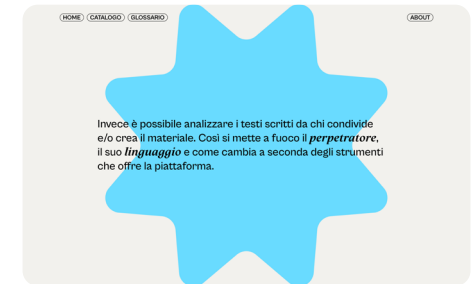
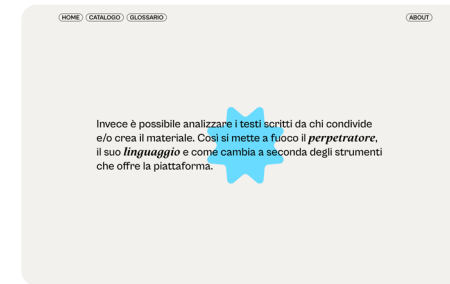
← Fig. 31
The brief insights intended for users who are less familiar with technical terminology.

→ Fig. 32
The continuation of the home page with an introduction to the research area: the most important paragraphs are highlighted by a coloured shape that expands when scrolling.



scroll through the homepage and will see the initial animation on the screen with the project's title and subtitle. The homepage was designed to introduce the research theme, namely the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse, in a clear but concise manner and to contain the minimum information necessary for the user to contextualize the material they will find in the other sections.

By scrolling, users can read short text paragraphs that provide a punctual and concise narrative starting from the definition of image-based sexual abuse, presenting the role that platforms have in its proliferation, and concluding by presenting the area of investigation, namely online vernacular. Some of the paragraphs contain a geometric shape (decagon) next to some words: by hovering the cursor over it, the user can read brief insights into some terms considered necessary for those who are not already familiar with them (fig. 31). The homepage concludes by presenting the two sections that contain the

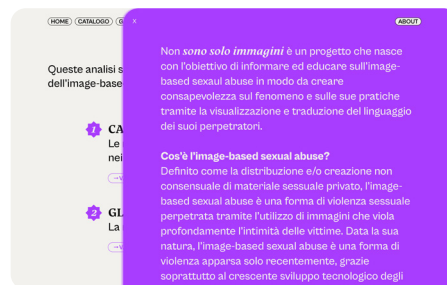
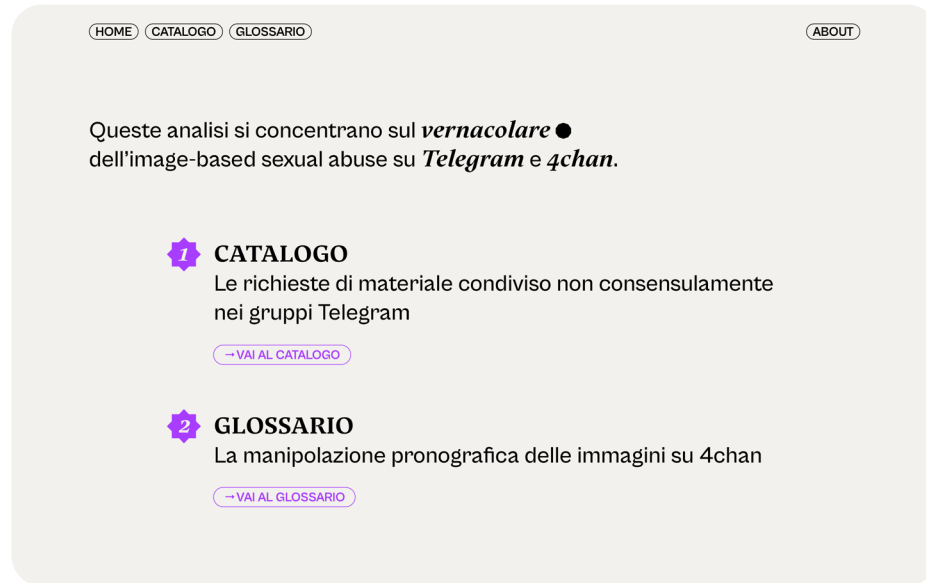


research: the “Catalogo” and the “Glossario” (fig. 33).

As mentioned in 3.4.4, each section has a dedicated “About” page; the one on the homepage contains general information about the research and the area in which it was conducted (fig. 34).

↓ Fig. 33
The presentation of the two sections of the website.

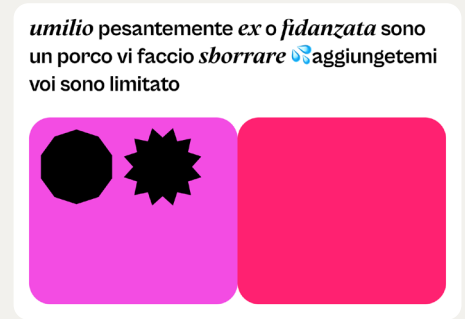
↓ Fig. 34
The general “About” section.



3.4.7 Catalogo: Requests for Material Shared Non-Consensually on Telegram Groups

The “Catalogo” section is dedicated to the results that emerged from the research carried out on Telegram. In particular, user requests in the analyzed pornographic groups in section 2.3.5 have been transformed into 313 postcard format images (fig. 35), which are then arranged in a virtual catalogue (fig. 36) that allows filtering with certain parameters (fig. 37).

→ Fig. 35
Some of the postcards created from users' requests in Telegram groups.



3. A Digital Space to Inform About Image-Based Sexual Abuse



HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Il *catalogo* raccoglie le richieste riguardanti immagini e/o video più ripetute dagli utenti in 4 gruppi.

Filtri

Che azione viene proposta: Scambiare Eliacluire Commentare Cercare Mostrare Denigrare Avere Mandare Regalare

Chi è il soggetto del materiale: Partner Ex Genitore Amic* +Figli* Parente Minore Ragazz* Sorella o fratello Consente* Vip

Di che genere è il soggetto: Femminile Maschile Non Specificato

Di che categoria è il materiale: Stupro Pedopornografia Sesso orale Spy cam Diretta



← Fig. 36 Overview of the first 220 postcards.

↑ Fig. 37 Filters to select which postcards to view correspond to the categories identified in 2.3.5.

→ Fig. 38 The “Commenting” filter when selected.

HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Il *catalogo* raccoglie le richieste riguardanti immagini e/o video più ripetute dagli utenti in 4 gruppi.

Filtri

Che azione viene proposta: Scambiare Eliacluire Commentare Cercare Mostrare Denigrare Avere Mandare Regalare

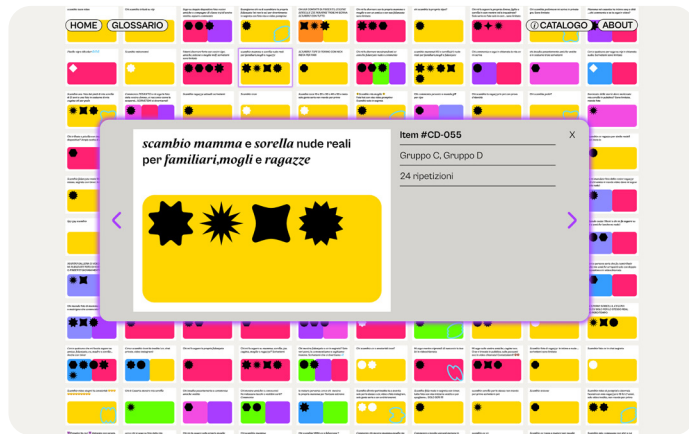
Chi è il soggetto del materiale: Partner Ex Genitore Amic* +Figli* Parente Minore Ragazz* Sorella o fratello Consente* Vip

Di che genere è il soggetto: Femminile Maschile Non Specificato

Di che categoria è il materiale: Stupro Pedopornografia Sesso orale Spy cam Diretta



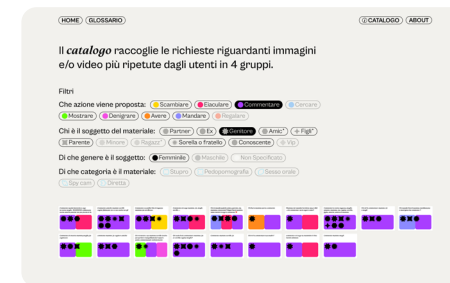
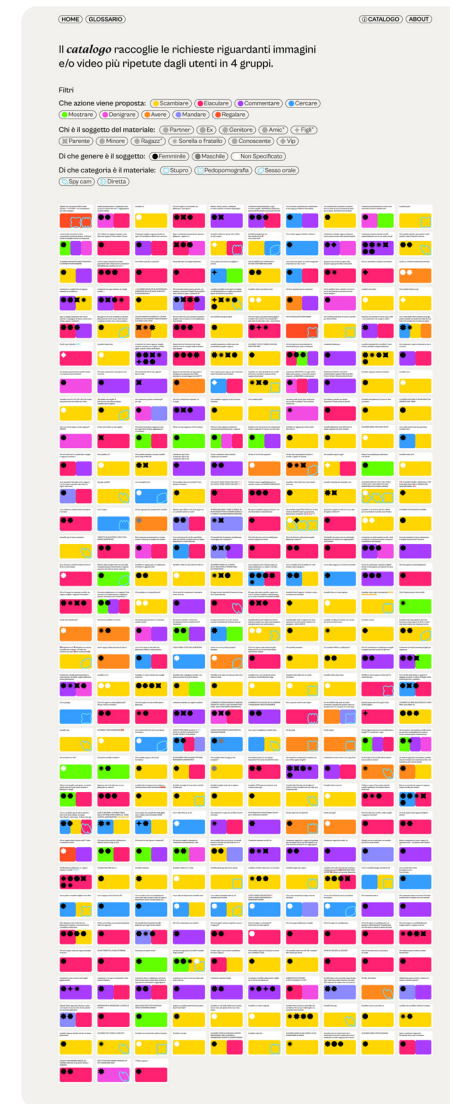
Each postcard contains a request made in the Telegram groups, highlighting the corresponding keywords for the requested actions and objects identified in section 2.3.5. Beneath the sentences, one or more rectangles represent the requested action and are coloured differently based on the category to which they belong. Inside the rectangles, one can find filled geometric shapes that represent the subject people of the requested material, coloured according to their gender, or empty geometric shapes that represent the categories of the requested material (see section 2.3.5). The parameters used to filter the postcards correspond to these categories and the graphic elements present within them.



This artefact was designed to provide an overview of user requests made in the analyzed Telegram groups. In fact, the postcards are arranged in rows of ten, allowing for different information to be acquired while scrolling, such as the most requested actions or subjects. This process is made even simpler thanks to the filters, which, when selected, exclude all postcards that do not contain the chosen elements, giving the user a defined and quantifiable set of the popularity of that action, subject, genre, or category of material.

↑ Fig. 39
Cards of two postcards with an engagement and additional information about them.

→ Fig. 40
Different views of the catalogue depending on the selected filters.





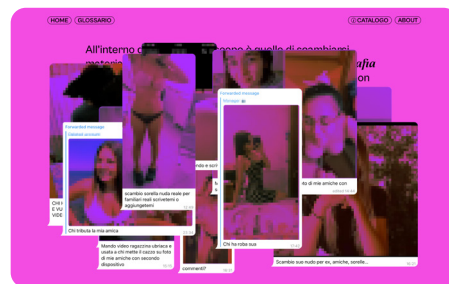
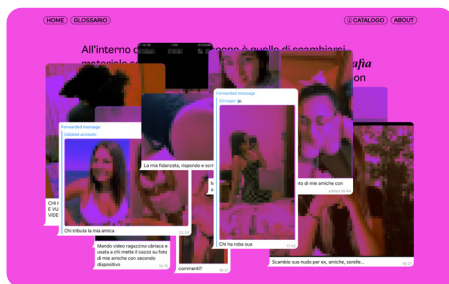
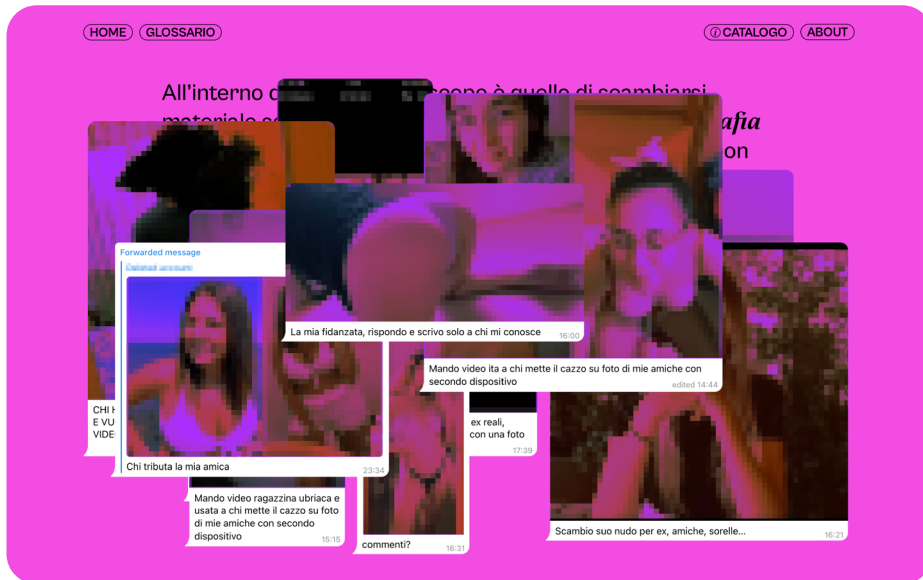
Alongside this overview, a detailed view is also offered. By clicking on each postcard, a tab opens with a larger view and some additional information, such as the code of the group where the request was made, the number of times it was repeated, or a brief glossary in case the postcard contained particular terms (fig. 39).

The intention is to provide the user with a complete and objective overview of what happens in Telegram pornographic groups regarding image-based sexual abuse, as well as to provide more precise data on the practices involved and the type of materials used. The literal reproduction of texts written by users of these groups in an external context aims to highlight the absurdity of the normalization of image-based sexual abuse practices in these protected and safeguarded Telegram communities (see section 2.2.3.2). In fact, it is unthinkable to imagine carrying out such discussions and behaviours in a space aimed at a more heterogeneous audience. Even just reading them causes discomfort, yet in digital communities like Telegram groups, these conversations are commonplace.

↑ Fig. 41
The first screen of the “Catalogo” requires a simple interaction from the user who has to remove the stylized postcards by hovering over them with the cursor.

→ Fig. 42
The first introduction screens of the “Catalogo” section.





The “Catalogo” section begins with a brief introduction to Telegram and how image-based sexual abuse is perpetrated on the platform (fig. 42), using, among other things, some screens from the groups analyzed in section 2.3.5 to help the user contextualize the phenomenon and introduce them to the language used (fig. 43).

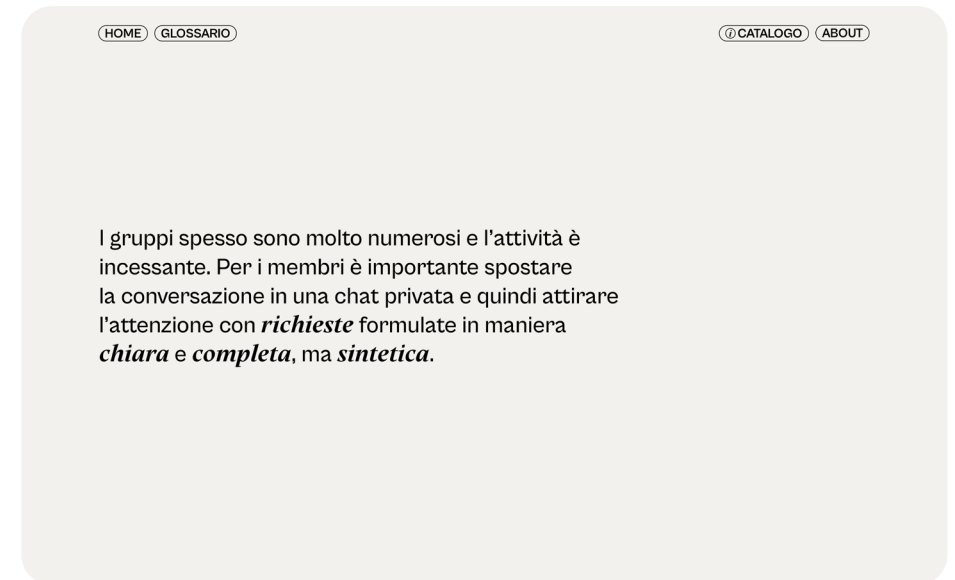
It goes on to explain the visual analysis and interpretation that has been done for each request (fig. 44) in order to make the catalogue's reading more fluid. It concludes with the catalogue itself, where the filters are presented first, followed by all the postcards.

As seen in section 3.4.4, there is a specific information section for the “Catalogo,” which contains a more in-depth explanation of how the research was conducted within Telegram (fig. 45).

← Fig. 43 Some example screenshots from Telegram groups.

↘ Fig. 44 (pp. 156-157) A sample of postcard construction.

↘ Fig. 45 The information section of the “Catalogo” can be consulted at any time.




HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Ad esempio, ecco come è stata analizzata e interpretata visivamente la richiesta di un utente:

1 I verbi indicano cosa l'utente ha intenzione di fare con il materiale che possiede o che vuole. Il verbo è rappresentato da un rettangolo colorato in base al significato.

Chi *scambia* mega PED/TEEN con un files misto da 40.000 (stupri,spy,ped,teen, famose Ecc) scrivetemi voi!! 🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆




HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Ad esempio, ecco come è stata analizzata e interpretata visivamente la richiesta di un utente:

3 In questa richiesta si parla anche di persone famose. La forma è nera perché ne è specificato il genere (femminile).

Chi *scambia* mega PED/TEEN con un files misto da 40.000 (stupri,spy,ped,teen, famose Ecc) scrivetemi voi!! 🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆




HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Ad esempio, ecco come è stata analizzata e interpretata visivamente la richiesta di un utente:

2 Spesso è specificato il soggetto del materiale. I soggetti sono divisi in gruppi e ogni gruppo è associato a una forma. Il colore della forma è dato dal genere del soggetto. Qui si parla di teenager, che appartengono al gruppo "minore" e di cui non è espresso il genere.

Chi *scambia* mega PED/TEEN con un files misto da 40.000 (stupri,spy,ped,teen, famose Ecc) scrivetemi voi!! 🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆

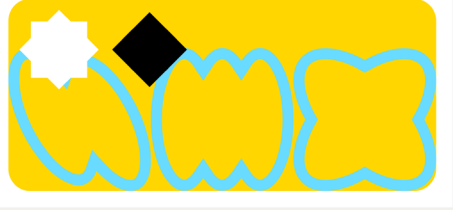


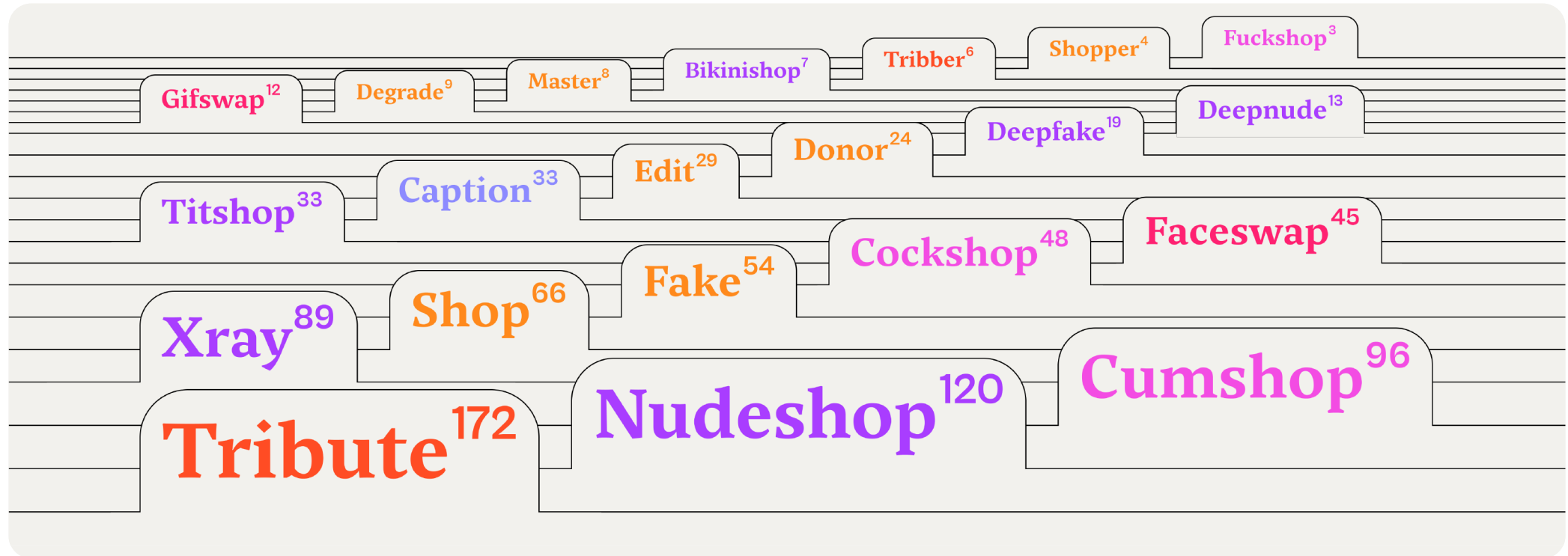
HOME GLOSSARIO CATALOGO ABOUT

Ad esempio, ecco come è stata analizzata e interpretata visivamente la richiesta di un utente:

4 A volte viene specificata la categoria del materiale. Qui ne sono presenti diverse: pedopornografia, stupri e spy cam. Queste sono associate a una forma vuota. Visto che non è possibile attribuire un genere, il colore del contorno è fisso.

Chi *scambia* mega PED/TEEN con un files misto da 40.000 (stupri,spy,ped,teen, famose Ecc) scrivetemi voi!! 🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆🍆





3.4.8 Glossario: Pornographic Image Manipulation on 4chan

The “Glossario” section is dedicated to the findings that emerged from the research on 4chan and, in particular, those related to the protocol on the online vernacular of image-based sexual abuse on /r/ (see 2.3.2). These have been communicated by arranging the identified terms in the form of a filing system and resizing them based on the number of times they were repeated within the analyzed threads (fig. 46). The words are also divided into the macro-categories identified in 2.3.2 (fig. 47), each of which is assigned a colour. The intent of this initial visualization is, similarly to what was done for Telegram, to give an overview to the user who can immediately perceive some key information, such as which terms are most used.

The virtual cards that contain the terms can be expanded by clicking on them, thus accessing the full version of the card (fig. 48), where it is possible to read the definition of each term, a list of variants, a list of related terms, and a

↑ Fig. 46
Index card-style display of 4chan terms.

→ Fig. 47
The categories in which the terms have been divided are the same as in 2.3.2.



Il *glossario* raccoglie i termini tecnici più ripetuti tra le richieste di manipolazione di immagini.

Che tipo di azione viene richiesta? ● Manipolare il soggetto

● Spostare il soggetto in un'altra immagine ● Aggiungere elementi al soggetto

● Modifica generica ● Azione fisica ● Commento



Varianti - ¹trib, ²cock tribute, ³cum tribute

Il tribute è una pratica performativa che prevede la masturbazione e successiva eiaculazione di un soggetto (solitamente di genere maschile) sull'immagine o video di un altro soggetto (solitamente di genere femminile). Il gesto deve necessariamente essere immortalato in uno scatto fotografico o in un breve filmato a scopo dimostrativo. Questo passaggio è particolarmente importante perché il tribute viene richiesto da terzi soggetti, che condividono una o più immagini della persona su cui vogliono che avvenga l'azione, e quindi la prova fotografica o video viene condivisa in modo che possano accertarsi dell'atto avvenuto e usufruirne.

Il termine tribute, spesso abbreviato in trib, è quello più generico. Tuttavia ne esistono due tipi differenti: il cock tribute, che prevede il sovrapporre o affiancare il pene eretto all'immagine, e il cum tribute, che invece richiede la presenza di liquido seminale sull'immagine del soggetto.

Vedi anche: → Tribber → Degradate

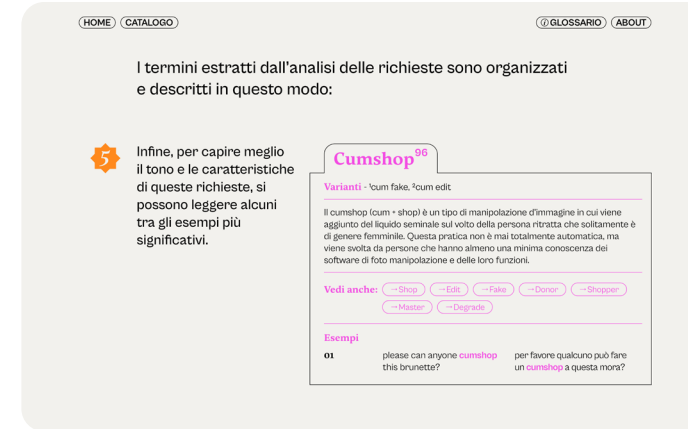
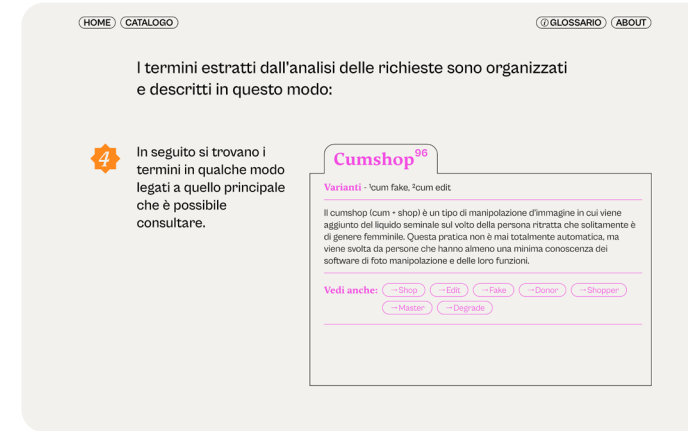
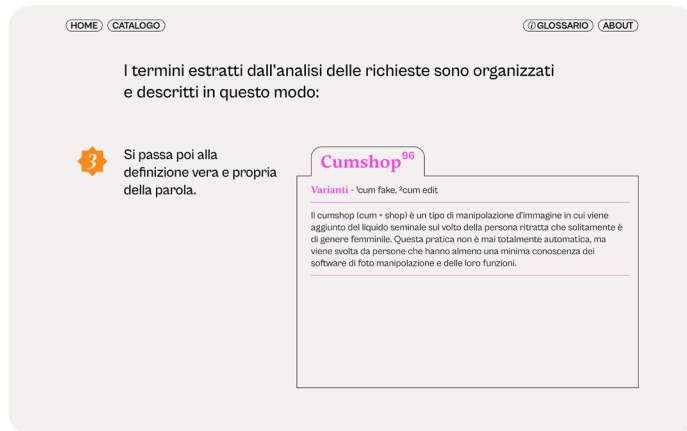
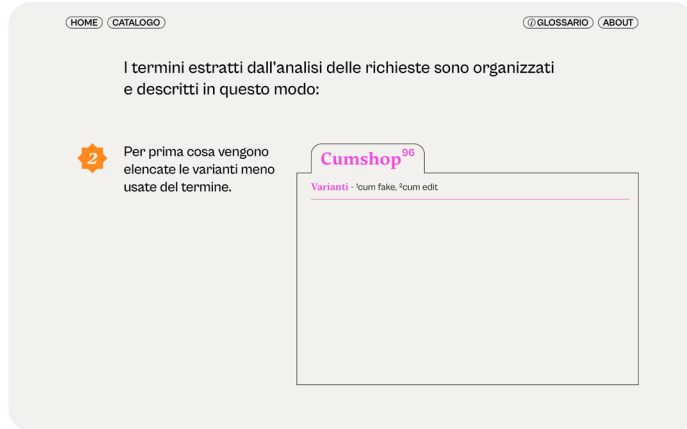
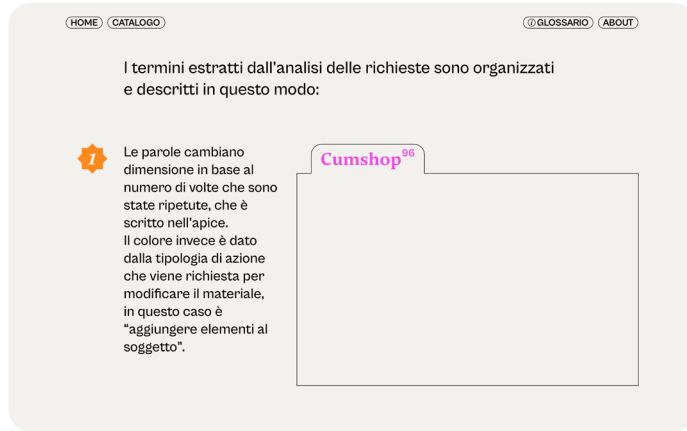
Esempi

01	Im doing cum trib , post bitches with bangs only	Farò cum trib , postate solo troie con la frangetta
02	Pomstar/Model/Celeb cock & cum tributes	cock & cum tribute su Pomstar/Modelle/Celebrità
03	Looking for some big dick tributes for my fiancé!	Sto cercando qualche tribute con cazzo grande per la mia fidanzata!
04	This slut turns 19 today, anyone got a tribute for her?	Questa puttana compie 19 anni oggi, qualcuno le fa un tribute ?
05	Please cum tribute my friend, cock tributes also welcome	Per favore fate un cum tribute sulla mia amica, vanno bene anche cock tribute
06	looking to get tributes over this pretty face. cock or cum, whichever works	sto cercando di far fare tribute su questa bella faccia. cazzo o sborra, qualunque funzioni
07	I'm surprised no one has paid tribute to this fit goddess yet	Sono sorpreso che nessuno abbia ancora pagato un tribute a questa dea del fitness
08	anyone who can help with tribute for my former coworker? never stopped dreaming about her	qualcuno che può aiutarmi con un tribute sulla mia ex collega? non ho mai smesso di sognarla

series of examples taken directly from the /r/ board of 4chan with their translation. Here too, the language remains technical and objective, in fact, it is intended to offer the user the possibility of forming a personal idea of the topic, presenting it in the most acritical way possible and relying on the fact that the absurdity and violence of the behaviours and languages normalized within /r/ will be evident enough, even in this case, by moving them to a different environment. In addition, it is also intended to make the user reflect on the variety of practices related to image-based sexual abuse, moving away from narratives that speak exclusively of non-consensual dissemination of private sexual material and shedding light on all the other aspects rarely discussed.

← Fig. 48 Card of the word "Tribute."

↑ Fig. 49 The user can open multiple "Glossario" tabs simultaneously.



← Fig. 52 An example of building a card.

↓ Fig. 53 The information section of the "Glossario" can be consulted at any time.





Chapter 4

Conclusions

The conclusions are a moment of reflection on the objectives achieved by the project. They begin with a consideration of the design contribution of “*Non sono solo immagini*” (4.1), continue speculating on the future developments of the research and project (4.2), and conclude with a brief personal reflection (4.3).

4.1 Design Contribution

The ideal goal set at the beginning of the research phase for this thesis was to create something that would help to understand, and contextualize, but also educate about, raise awareness towards, and therefore fight against image-based sexual abuse.

“*Non sono solo immagini*,” created only after research was completed and evidence obtained, remains true to its initial intentions. In addition, arriving at its design with greater awareness and knowledge of the subject—precisely as a result of the research carried out—it was possible to focus on two further objectives: giving visibility to the most hidden and least discussed practices and shifting the focus from victims to perpetrators, a goal that was achieved by focusing on the vernacular language used in conversations. In this sense, one of the major design contributions of “*Non sono solo immagini*” is precisely the creation of a different narrative perspective from the one that the media often focuses on, capable of recounting a violent phenomenon such as image-based sexual abuse without softening it, but also without falling into easy stereotypes and sensationalistic rhetoric or disrespecting the victim. However, the project’s goal is not just to shift attention, which is only the primary means of educating and creating awareness of the phenomenon. It also aims to be a tool for social denunciation. In this sense, reproducing the aggressive, derogatory, and vulgar words of the perpetrators serves two functions: the first is to make the absurdity and violence of image-based sexual abuse crudely evident, which often occurs unabated within very large communities; the second is to take the final step towards ending victim blaming by exposing the tone of the conversations and the violence of the practices of those who perpetrate it.

“*Non sono solo immagini*,” therefore, once again demonstrates that design and designers can intervene to facilitate social change and denounce existing violence, discrimination, and inequality and that the way to do so is not necessarily through open criticism. On the contrary, representing and visualizing existing but hidden structures, even technically and objectively, can stimulate the public to a critical reflection, the starting point for a discussion based on common, shared, and accessible knowledge, a discussion that ultimately has the potential to bring about social change.

“*Non sono solo immagini*” is, in conclusion, a digital artefact that aims to educate and create social awareness, designed with the methods and techniques of communication

design, which facilitate its verbal and visual presentation. Precisely because of the union of these two aspects—design and social commentary—it can be a particularly useful tool: maintaining aspects such as functionality, recognizability, and innovation made it possible to create a non-obvious but easy-to-follow narrative, meeting the needs of the target audience, but without losing the aspects of depth and denunciation in a product that stands out from a newspaper article or an academic publication but maintains a solid foundation of research.

4.2 Sviluppi futuri

As previously stated, “*Non sono solo immagini*” is by no means an endpoint: it is simply a concrete foundation for opening critical discussions that can lead to change. In addition to this, however, there are possible future developments in the project, as hinted at by the homepage of the website itself.

Indeed, the same research and investigative methods used to study 4chan and Telegram can be easily restructured to be applied to other digital platforms: image-based sexual abuse is perpetrated in many places, but it always requires communication and interaction among users to be put into action, in this sense, there are many other possibilities for studying the vernacular language of image-based sexual abuse online, possibilities that can easily be transformed into as many denunciation artefacts within “*Non sono solo immagini*”: it is enough to add the voices of the sections to the final list on the homepage and to the navigation bar. The site in this way could become a more complete and exhaustive container space on the phenomenon of image-based sexual abuse.

Finally, stepping out of the strict design perspective, the analysis of vernacular language has proven to be an extraordinary resource for investigating a form of sexual violence, so it is fair to wonder if it cannot also be a resource in investigations into other forms of violence, especially if perpetrated online.

4.3 Personal Considerations

One last personal observation: working on the topic of image-based sexual abuse was intentional, but not necessarily enjoyable. User conversations, material exchanged within communities, behaviours and attitudes are impossible to forget and the memory can be particularly frustrating at times because it's information I wouldn't have otherwise had access

to. However, once the initial emotional reaction was overcome, the awareness emerged that this information, which I wouldn't have otherwise had access to, represents abusive actions and discourse carried out daily by a large number of people in secret, away from the eyes of others. Hidden practices are difficult to combat: bringing them to light exposes them to a wider and more heterogeneous audience, and this audience, yes, can eradicate them; “*Non sono solo immagini*” is just one small step forward—hopefully—towards this goal.

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Table of figures

Fig. 01 (pp. 19)

The responses of 159 perpetrators to the question: "why did you share someone else's intimate images without their consent?"
Source: Eaton, Jacobs e Ruvalcaba (2017); rielaborata dall'autrice.

Fig. 02 (pp. 22-23)

Victims of non-consensual sharing of intimate images have reported poorer mental health scores and higher levels of physiological problems than non-victims.
Source: Eaton, Jacobs e Ruvalcaba (2017); reworked by the author.

Fig. 03 (pp. 23)

The kind of personal information of victims shared non-consensually along with private sexual images.
Source: (rielaborazione di) Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2014); reworked by the author.

Fig. 04 (pp. 26)

Percentage of female victims in various studies and surveys.
Source: Eaton Jacobs e Ruvalcaba (2017); Ruvalcaba, e Eaton (2019); Cyber Civil Rights Initiative (2014); Hall eHearn (2018); reworked by the author

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Perpetrators of image-based sexual abuse by gender in Eaton, Jacobs, and Ruvalcaba's (2017) study.
Source: Eaton, Jacobs e Ruvalcaba (2017); reworked by the author.

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The headlines of some of the Italian online articles on image-based sexual abuse cases in recent years.
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Source: Direzione Centrale Polizia Criminale (25 Novembre 2021); reworked by the author.

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Source: (reworked by) Permessio Negato (2021); reworked by the author.

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Structure of a 4chan board.
Source: Bernstein (2021); reworked by the author.

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Source: Catcalls of NYC, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/catcallsofny/>.

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Source: Why I Didn't Report, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/whyididntreport/>.

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Source: Why I Didn't Report, Instagram, <https://itsnotviolent.com/>.

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