

## Objectification of Female Cosplayers in Indonesia Digital Communities through the Case of Ai Kirishima

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article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-10-14 Revised: 2025-06-13 Published: 2025-06-24	This study explores the representation of female cosplayers in digital discourse, using the case of Ai Kirishima's murder as a lens to examine how gender-based bias manifests in public online commentary. The phenomenon is significant due to the increasing normalization of victim blaming and sexual objectification toward women in digital spaces, especially those engaged in pop culture expression like cosplay. Previous studies have addressed cyber harassment and online gender bias, yet few have critically examined how discursive practices shape collective perceptions of female victims in high-profile cases involving visual culture. This study formulates the problem of how netizen comments reflect gendered discourse that reinforces patriarchal values and justifies violence. Focusing on comments from TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram, the research employed a qualitative method with Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to analyse 120 selected comments. Data were coded thematically and interpreted across three levels: textual, discursive practice, and social context. The study reveals how women are consistently portrayed as passive objects subject to judgment, objectification, and blame, while perpetrators are often defended. These findings highlight the urgent need for gender-sensitive digital literacy and stronger content moderation policies. The study also acknowledges its limitation in scope and calls for broader research using inclusive and comparative approaches across digital cultures.

### Keywords:

Cosplay, Gender, Media, Victim Blaming

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of cosplay, short for "costume play," has become an integral part of contemporary popular culture, particularly among younger generations in Asia and around the world. Pushkareva and Agaltsova (2021) explain that cosplay is not merely a form of entertainment but also serves as a medium for expressing creativity and admiration for characters from anime, manga, video games, or films. According to Rahman et al. (2012), cosplayers imitate the appearance and persona of these characters through costumes and performative behavior. Furthermore, Li and Liu (2023) and Haque (2024) argue that cosplay can also function as a means of identity expression, particularly for individuals exploring or negotiating their social and gender roles. However, behind the growing popularity of cosplay lies a set of social dynamics that are often overlooked—especially regarding the treatment of female cosplayers. Yang (2022) and Az Zahra et al. (2024) observe that female cosplayers frequently face objectification, stereotyping, and harassment, both in face-to-face community interactions and on social media platforms. Liu and Mu (2022), as well as Berik et al. (2024), highlight that revealing costumes are often used as justification by some individuals to

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engage in harassment or to place blame on the cosplayers themselves for the violence they endure. This phenomenon reflects the persistent influence of patriarchal culture, in which women's bodies are positioned as objects of judgment, surveillance, and even blame.

Research using a visual criminology approach on female cosplayers on Platform X reveals frequent experiences of cyber sexual harassment via replies and anonymous platforms like Secreto and Retrospring (Satifa & Ramailis, 2025). Victims often report discomfort due to explicit comments on their photos, regardless of their behavior or appearance—supporting victimology perspectives that cyber violence can occur without provocation or prior relationship. The public's low awareness of the harm caused by sexualized commentary has made social media a vulnerable space for women, particularly cosplayers. According to WHO, one in three women globally—approximately 736 million—have experienced physical or sexual violence (Mohan, 2021), indicating the pervasiveness of gender-based violence even in developed countries. In Indonesia, sexual violence is often met with victim blaming, influenced by patriarchal values, media framing, and low gender literacy. Shopiani et al. (2021) found 63% of medical students moderately blamed victims, while Jacobus et al. (2025) confirmed the persistence of this mindset in academic circles. This culture is evident in the 2024 murder of Chinese cosplayer Ai Kirishima, where public discourse shifted blame to her appearance and social media persona rather than the perpetrator's brutality (UPstation, 2024; crazyforanimetrivia, 2024).

This study focuses on digital netizen responses to the murder of Ai Kirishima and how these responses construct narratives laden with gender bias and a tendency to blame the victim. In digital spaces, comments often reflect societal perceptions of women especially those who appear as cosplayers as visual objects to be monitored, judged, and even blamed for the violence they endure (Lucas, 2018). By applying Feminist Media Theory, which examines how media and the public construct and disseminate representations of women within a patriarchal framework (Ernanda, 2023), and Stuart Hall's theory of representation, which explains how meaning is shaped through discourse and how audiences participate in the meaning-making process (Platonov, 2024), this research becomes crucial. In the digital age, where public opinion is rapidly shaped through social media, it is important to critically examine how narratives of violence against women especially those active in popular culture such as cosplay are represented and interpreted. This study not only uncovers forms of victim blaming within digital communities but also offers a critical reflection on the position of women in media culture and a society still steeped in gender bias.

This study hypothesizes that digital netizen responses to the murder of Ai Kirishima are significantly influenced by gender-biased narratives and patriarchal discourse, which contribute to the normalization of victim blaming in online communities. It is expected that comments on social media platforms will reveal a pattern of discourse that objectifies female cosplayers and shifts responsibility for violence onto the victims rather than the perpetrators. Furthermore, through the lens of Feminist Media Theory and Hall's theory of representation, this research anticipates that digital audiences do not merely consume content passively but actively participate in constructing meaning that reinforces existing gender stereotypes. The hypothesis also assumes that representations of female cosplayers in media spaces are shaped by cultural expectations surrounding femininity, morality, and sexuality, which influence public judgment. Therefore, the study predicts a strong correlation between patriarchal values embedded in media discourse and the public's online reactions to violence against women in cosplay communities.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how representations of women and victim blaming appear in netizen responses to Ai Kirishima's murder. CDA is considered effective for analyzing how discourse reflects

and reproduces power structures in digital environments (Savitri et al., 2025). Fairclough's model analyzes language at three levels: textual, discursive practice, and socio-cultural context, including patriarchal norms and media dynamics. As argued by Alasiri (2024), this layered approach reveals how discourse links to broader ideological forces, particularly in gendered settings. Hackfort (2021) adds that CDA exposes how online communication sustains social inequality. In the realm of cosplay, Martens and Zscheischler (2022) observe that female cosplayers often face objectification due to the visual and performative nature of the subculture. Thus, CDA helps this study uncover how online narratives about femininity and morality reinforce gender bias and normalize victim blaming in digital conversations.

The data in this study were obtained through documentation of user comments on various Indonesian digital platforms, including Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. These platforms were chosen due to their significant role in shaping public discourse on viral issues, particularly high-profile cases such as the murder of Ai Kirishima. Alodat et al. (2023) highlight that social media platforms with broad user engagement often serve as digital arenas where collective opinions are formed and contested. Comments were purposively selected from posts explicitly discussing the case, focusing on those that conveyed gendered narratives, demonstrated bias, or revealed problematic assumptions about female cosplayers. According to Mueller-Herbst et al. (2020), purposive sampling in digital ethnography enables researchers to target discursive materials rich in ideological content. Only comments that were linguistically substantive and discursively relevant were included in the analysis. As Naeem et al. (2024) assert, achieving data saturation—when no new themes emerge—is crucial to ensure that collected data reflect both diversity and consistency in public opinion.

Thematic coding was employed to identify discursive patterns in the representation of the victim and the framing of the incident. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis allows researchers to uncover latent and explicit meanings within qualitative data by categorizing recurring themes. In this study, key themes such as the objectification of the female body, moral judgment toward women's behavior, and the distortion of victimhood were systematically identified and grouped. Kiger and Varpio (2020) argue that this method is particularly effective for tracing how social narratives are constructed and maintained through language. For instance, several comments questioned the victim's morality based on her cosplay appearance, while others implied she bore partial responsibility for the violence due to her online persona. These discursive patterns were then examined at the textual level of Fairclough's framework. As noted by Liu et al. (2023), textual analysis within CDA involves close attention to word choice, metaphors, syntactic structures, and evaluative language that encode ideological positions on gender, power, and blame.

At the levels of discursive practice and social context, this analysis investigated how user comments were both shaped by and contributed to dominant cultural narratives and institutional ideologies. Tenorio (2011) emphasizes that discourse is never isolated from its socio-institutional context, as it continuously interacts with existing systems of meaning. Within digital platforms, particularly in comment sections, this interplay becomes visible through the reproduction of patriarchal values. Khan and MacEachen (2021) note that social media environments often enable the rapid circulation of gender-biased discourse, which reinforces traditional power hierarchies. This tendency is especially pronounced in the cosplay community, where female participants are frequently subjected to hypersexualization and moral judgment. As observed by Endendijk et al. (2019) and Duman (2023), digital cultures can cultivate environments where moral policing and victim blaming are normalized. By tracing the link between individual expressions and systemic patterns, this study underscores the importance of promoting critical media literacy and gender-aware discourse to resist harmful narratives in online public spaces.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Profile and Patterns of Netizen Comments

Various patterns of commentary emerged that reflect public perceptions toward both the victim and the perpetrator. These comments were collected from digital spaces where the case was actively discussed and were categorized thematically to reveal how public opinion is constructed and which discourses dominate the conversation. The findings not only represent momentary emotional reactions but also expose deeper social constructions, such as the tendency toward victim blaming, the objectification of female bodies, and the rationalization of violence committed by the perpetrator. On the other hand, there were also comments that expressed empathy and sympathy for the victim, although these were not the majority.

By presenting this data systematically, the researcher aims to illustrate the dynamics of digital discourse that are heavily laden with gender bias (Ellis, 2023), and to examine its implications for how society views women particularly those who express themselves actively in digital communities (Suwana & Lily, 2017) such as cosplay. The researcher selected four posts from different social media platforms TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram that had high engagement and represented diverse digital channels. These posts not only disseminated initial information about the case but also served as active discussion spaces populated by hundreds of netizen responses.



Figure 1. Post 1  
TikTok (P1)



Figure 2. Post 2  
Facebook (P2)



Figure 3. Post 3  
Instagram (P3)



Figure 4. Post 4  
Instagram (P4)

The images above depict four social media posts that were purposively selected as primary sources for collecting comments in this study due to their high levels of interaction and their use of visual content and narratives that captured public attention. The first post (P1) (anigemsloreid, 2024), uploaded on TikTok by @anigemsloreid, features CCTV footage clips and segments from Ai Kirishima's content. The TikTok format tends to emphasize sensationalism and mystery, which is evident from the high engagement: 155.6K likes, 4,081 shares, and 650 comments. The second (P2) (Seputar Otaku, 2024) and fourth (P4) (seputarotaku, 2024) posts, both uploaded by the account "Seputar Otaku" on Facebook and Instagram respectively, use a combination of sensational text and striking cosplay images. The headline (translated to English), "FAMOUS COSPLAYER MURDERED BY HER BOYFRIEND, BODY MUTILATED AND DUMPED IN THE MOUNTAINS," intensifies the tragic tone while inviting both sympathy and curiosity. These posts generated hundreds of comments with varied tones of discussion, indicating that the dramatic framing of visuals and text successfully provoked significant responses from netizens.

The third post (P3) (live\_anime\_id, 2024), uploaded by @live\_anime\_id on Instagram, includes two cosplay photos of the victim with a feminine visual style, and opens with the explicit line (translated to English): "A COSPLAYER FROM CHINA WAS MURDERED AND MUTILATED BY HER OWN



BOYFRIEND!” Although the post received fewer responses only 22 comments it powerfully shaped the victim’s image as a visually appealing figure.

In general, these four posts convey a similar narrative combining extreme violence, the visual appeal of the victim as a cosplayer, and sensational news framing. This style of delivery significantly influenced how netizens responded, whether through empathetic reactions or the justification of violence. The total number of comments gathered from these four posts, as of July 3, 2024, was 1,276, with 120 comments selected as the main data sample for thematic analysis. The selection of these posts was based on two main criteria: high interaction rates (comments and likes) (Tan & Lim, 2020) and diversity of platforms and narrative framing styles (Austin, 2010). This foundation enabled the analysis to more broadly capture the dynamics of public discourse across multiple social media channels.

**Tabel 1. Number of Comments**

No.	Post	Platform	Account	Comments	Picked
1	Post 1 (P1)	TikTok	anigemsloreid	650	40
2	Post 2 (P2)	Facebook	Seputar Otaku	190	40
3	Post 3 (P3)	Instagram	live_anime_id	22	9
4	Post 4 (P4)	Instagram	seputarotaku	414	31
<b>Total</b>				<b>1,276</b>	<b>120</b>

The visualizations of the four posts can be seen in Figure 2 through Figure 5, which display the visual representations and initial narratives used by each account to frame the incident. These narratives generally emphasize elements of violence, the victim’s popularity as a cosplayer, and include images that reinforce the visual impression of Ai Kirishima as a physically attractive figure. These elements played a significant role in shaping the direction of netizen responses in the comment sections, influencing whether comments expressed empathy, judgment, or justification of violence.

### Thematic Category Findings

An analysis of 120 netizen comments collected from four social media platforms revealed four main thematic categories: victim blaming (29.2%), objectification of women’s bodies (23.3%), defense of the perpetrator (20.8%), and empathy toward the victim (26.7%). Most comments reflected negative bias against the victim—whether by blaming her lifestyle and personal relationships, demeaning her physical appearance in sexual terms, or justifying the perpetrator’s actions based on emotional reasoning. These three categories collectively point to the strong influence of patriarchal culture and the normalization of violence in digital discourse. In contrast, empathetic comments appeared in a smaller proportion, expressing condolences and concern over the tragic nature of the victim’s death. While these responses highlight a sense of humanity, they remain overshadowed by the dominant narratives that place blame on the victim. These findings indicate that the digital space has not yet become a fully safe or supportive environment for women, particularly those who are victims of violence.

**Tabel 3. Number of Thematic Categories**

No	Thematic Category	Number of Comments	Percentage	Example Comments (translated)
1	Victim Blaming	35	29,2%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Surprised, right? Same here. Just fat, unemployed, and probably has psychological issues."</li> <li>• "Yeah, I'm also surprised, damn. And he's toxic too. If he were kind and not toxic, then maybe okay... I'm just surprised someone that pretty would go for him."</li> <li>• "I don't think he was in love; the guy was just blindly obsessed and got milked like a cash cow by the girl. That's what I think."</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Don't be too quick to blame the guy—we don't really know what happened. Maybe the girl in that post was way above his league and just used him as a slave. Who would want to be treated like that forever? I don't know, just my speculation. Remember the fatcat case? The truth turned out to be very different from what was first reported."</li><li>• "Cosplayer drama? Murdered, raped, abused, it's daily business. If you don't want to die a horrible death, stay away from cosplayers."</li></ul>
2	Objectification of Women's Bodies	28	23,3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "So pretty but likes a lump of pig."</li><li>• "Yeah, that's why it's such a shame, she was really beautiful."</li><li>• "Too bad, she had smooth skin... but choose the wrong boyfriend."</li><li>• "She as pretty, though."</li><li>• "Really embodied the role of Ai Hoshino."</li></ul>
3	Defense of the Perpetrator	25	20,8%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I don't think he actually loved her; he was just simping hard and got milked like a cash cow by the girl. That's just my opinion."</li><li>• "I think the guy killed her out of heartbreak. He weighed like 150 kg, probably just her money source to buy costumes or whatever."</li><li>• "Personally, I think this case was driven by deep resentment—it couldn't have been over something trivial. If you remember the fatcat case (for those who know), maybe it's similar. Maybe the girl just used him, cheated, or did something that deeply hurt his pride to the point he couldn't take it anymore."</li><li>• "The guy had been bottling up jealousy for months."</li><li>• "Maybe it was out of heartbreak, sis. Some say the girl often treated her boyfriend that way, like constantly giving him psychological pressure, so he ended up killing her. It's important not to act like you can do anything just because you're rich or pretty."</li></ul>
4	Empathy Toward the Victim	32	26,7%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "It's really sad... she was already stabbed to death in the anime, and now in real life she was mutilated." 🙄</li><li>• "Kirishima: 'Thank you for finding my body,' to the hiker." 🙄</li><li>• "So sad, she was actually really pretty."</li><li>• "What a misfortune—ended up meeting someone mentally unstable."</li><li>• "So tragic... she died in such a brutal way."</li></ul>
Total		120	100%	

This distribution shows that gender-biased discourse such as victim blaming, objectification, and defense of the perpetrator dominates 73.3% of the conversation, while expressions of empathy account for only 26.7%. This pattern indicates the strong presence of patriarchal culture and rape culture in digital spaces, even within hobby-based communities like cosplay.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis of Netizen Comments on the Ai Kirishima Case

Theme	Description	Examples	Scholarly Perspective
Victim Blaming Comments	Comments that hold the victim responsible for the violence she experienced, shifting accountability away from the perpetrator.	- "Cosplayer drama? Killed, raped... that's everyday stuff."- "If you don't want to die horribly, stay away from cosplayers."	Victim blaming reflects rape-myth acceptance, which justifies violence by blaming victims for their behavior or appearance (Peeters & Goetz, 2022; Adair & Senn, 2025). It remains a dominant narrative in digital discourse (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2024).

Objectification of Women's Bodies	Comments that reduce the victim to her physical attributes, ignoring her dignity and identity.	- "So pretty but into that blob of fat."- "What a pity... her skin was so smooth."	Objectification strips women of agency and constructs them as mere visual commodities, particularly in cosplay contexts (Leng, 2014). This legitimizes control and even violence against women.
Justifying the Perpetrator's Actions	Comments that defend or rationalize the perpetrator's violence by portraying him as emotionally wounded or manipulated.	- "He killed her out of heartbreak... maybe she was just using him."	Such comments reflect a reversal of the victim-perpetrator dynamic and normalize violence as a result of male emotional distress (Wilson, 2014). This undermines justice by shifting sympathy toward the perpetrator.
Empathetic Responses	Comments that recognize the brutality of the crime and express sympathy for the victim as a human being.	- "So sad, the way she died was truly brutal."	Empathy can challenge toxic digital narratives and promote a survivor-centered discourse (Wilson, 2014). However, such comments are still overshadowed by dominant victim-blaming and objectifying narratives.

Based on the thematic analysis presented in the table above, it can be concluded that netizen responses to the murder case of Ai Kirishima predominantly reproduce gender-biased narratives, particularly through comments that blame the victim, objectify women's bodies, and defend the perpetrator. These comments not only reflect flawed individual perceptions but also highlight how digital culture functions as a space for reproducing patriarchal ideologies that blur the lines between perpetrator and victim. Victim-blaming narratives and justifications for violence create social legitimacy for gender-based violence, while the objectification of women reduces the victim's identity to mere visual aesthetics deemed suitable for judgment, control, or even possession. Although some comments expressed empathy, their presence was minimal and often drowned out by the dominant negative discourse. This indicates that digital spaces have not yet fully evolved into platforms for fair and victim-centered discussions, underscoring the urgent need for gender literacy and more responsive content moderation policies to combat symbolic violence and discriminatory discourse against women.

## Discussion

### Representation of Women in Netizen Comments

In the case of Ai Kirishima, the representation of women found in netizen comments can be analyzed through the lens of Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation. Omar, H. (2023) argues that representation is not a direct reflection of reality, but rather a construction of meaning through language, symbols, and discourse shaped by media and reinterpreted by audiences. This perspective suggests that the meanings associated with women in this context are not formed in a neutral vacuum but are instead produced within a socio-cultural structure embedded with power relations, including gender dynamics. Based on an analysis of the comments, it becomes evident that female cosplayers like Ai Kirishima are often portrayed more as passive objects than as active subjects. This aligns with Stokoe's (2006) assertion that women are frequently positioned in discourse as passive participants, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. Such representations are manifested in patterns of commentary that include victim blaming—where responsibility for violence is shifted onto the victim—and objectifying language that evaluates women primarily in sexualized terms. As noted by Gravelin et al. (2019), these forms of discourse reflect a broader societal tendency to scrutinize and control women's bodies, framing them as legitimate targets for judgment, regulation, or even harm.

In the meaning-making process that Hall conceptualizes as encoding and decoding, messages are not simply transmitted but are actively constructed and interpreted within specific cultural contexts. According to Adibe Nwafor and Chinasa Alegu (2018), this process allows media texts—such as social media posts featuring dramatic visuals of victims—to encode particular messages, often framing the victim as both visually appealing and "controversial." These messages are then decoded by audiences, who frequently interpret them through a hegemonic lens. This dominant reading, as Hall suggests, tends to reinforce prevailing power structures—in this case, patriarchal ideologies. Netizens, as the decoding audience, often adopt such hegemonic readings that frame women not as autonomous individuals but as sources of conflict or as sexualized objects. This is reflected in comments such as "too bad, she was pretty" or "she probably just used him," which diminish the agency of the victim and redefine her identity in relation to male figures. As Lopes (2021) argues, such responses demonstrate how women are frequently denied subjectivity and are instead positioned within narratives shaped by male-centered assumptions.

Only a small portion of the comments reflect what Hall would describe as an oppositional reading—interpretations that challenge the dominant, misogynistic narratives and instead express empathy toward the victim. As noted by Arsawati and Bunga (2022), these types of responses recognize Ai Kirishima as a whole human being who has experienced violence and is therefore deserving of empathy and respect. However, such empathetic readings remain in the minority and are largely overshadowed by the dominant discourse that continues to marginalize women. Doiciar and Crețan (2025) observe that this marginalization is perpetuated through digital interactions that often reproduce harmful gender norms. Overall, the analysis suggests that the representation of women in netizen responses to Ai Kirishima's case is shaped by deeply rooted patriarchal structures. These structures, as argued by Sullivan (2020), tend to reproduce women primarily as visual and symbolic objects rather than as autonomous subjects. This presents a significant challenge in the effort to create a more gender-just digital space—one in which women are recognized as active agents, entitled to dignity, protection, and the full exercise of their personhood.

### **Objectification and the Culture of Digital Patriarchy**

The objectification of female cosplayers in digital spaces can be understood as a concrete expression of patriarchal dominance operating through new media platforms. As argued by Murtiningsih and Advenita (2017), digital environments often replicate and intensify gendered power relations, reducing women to mere objects within visual culture. Within this framework, women's bodies are no longer seen as integral aspects of their identity, but are instead fragmented and assessed based on prevailing standards of beauty and sexual appeal. Chan et al. (2024) emphasize that such representations contribute to the dehumanization of women, framing them primarily through their physical appearance rather than their subjectivity. This tendency is evident in comments such as "what a pity, she had smooth skin" or "so pretty but into a lump of fat," which reflect the ways digital audiences commodify female bodies. According to Demirhan and Çakır-Demirhan (2015), such remarks exemplify how women are positioned as passive visual objects—consumed and judged—rather than as autonomous individuals with agency over their bodies and identities.

Feminist Media Theory emphasizes that media does not merely function as a channel for conveying information, but actively constructs and perpetuates patriarchal social structures. As Kalavathy and Professor (2024) argue, media—including social media—play a significant role in shaping and disseminating idealized images of women: attractive, desirable, and meant for visual consumption. Within this context, female cosplayers, who embody fictional characters through creative and visually striking costumes, are frequently situated unfairly within a gendered narrative. Nichols (2019) notes that such representations often strip female cosplayers of their identities as



artists or self-expressive individuals. Instead, their public presence is reframed through a sexualized lens that reduces them to objects for male gaze and consumption. This process, as highlighted by Naraindas et al. (2024), reinforces a cultural dynamic in which women's bodies are prioritized over their voices, agency, and creative intentions.

In digital spaces, the objectification of women is intensified by platform features that emphasize visualization and performativity. As Shahbaznezhad et al. (2022) observe, social media platforms are designed to prioritize visually engaging content, which inadvertently places cosplaying women's bodies at the center of public attention. This exposure, as noted by Metzler and Garcia (2023), renders female cosplayers particularly vulnerable to exploitation by other users, as their appearances are amplified by algorithmic systems that reward visibility over substance. This phenomenon reflects what Kellie et al. (2019) describe as a digital patriarchy—an online structure that transforms women's bodies into consumable content while enabling sexualized commentary, harassment, and moral scrutiny. Crucially, such objectification is not simply a matter of individual perception but is embedded within a broader systemic framework that reinforces the subordination of women. According to Bareket and Shnabel (2019), digital environments—rather than serving as neutral or liberating spaces—often become arenas for the reproduction of masculine power and dominance. As a result, female cosplayers bear a dual burden: they are expected to maintain visually appealing appearances to satisfy audience expectations, yet simultaneously become targets of demeaning and sexist remarks. This contradiction underscores the persistent tension between creative self-expression and structural gendered oppression within digital culture.

The objectification of female cosplayers in digital spaces illustrates the continued presence and adaptation of patriarchal values within modern media technologies. This phenomenon highlights how gender bias is not eliminated but rather reshaped through digital platforms. It emphasizes the importance of fostering critical awareness about how women are represented online and the impact of such portrayals. Addressing this issue requires not only a shift in public perception but also concrete actions—such as implementing platform regulations and promoting digital literacy—that protect women's dignity, rights, and agency in virtual environments.

### **Victim Blaming and the Rationalization of Violence**

Netizen comments on the Ai Kirishima case reflect how meanings about women are constructed and disseminated through processes of representation. According to Mohamed (2023), representation is not a reflection of reality, but a process of meaning-making that involves production (encoding), consumption (decoding), and the reproduction of discourse. Similarly, Rocha (2013) emphasizes that representation plays a crucial role in shaping social understandings of gender identity. In this context, social media posts and narratives have represented Ai Kirishima as both visually appealing and controversial. These representations were then consumed by netizens through comments that tend to blame the victim, objectify her body, or even defend the perpetrator. This phenomenon aligns with the views of Jacobs (2016) and Nirmalasari and Sarwono (2021), who argue that public responses to women in cases of violence are often influenced by gender-biased social constructions.

From the perspective of Feminist Media Theory, the portrayal of women in this case reflects their positioning as passive objects rather than active subjects. As noted by Study MassCom (2024), women are often depicted in media narratives as lacking agency, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. Awasthi (2017) argues that the female body frequently becomes the center of sexualized commentary, with women's identities reduced to their visual appeal. This dynamic is further embedded in what Gervais and Eagan (2017) describe as a digital patriarchal culture, in which both media and the public collaborate in reproducing discourses that marginalize women and normalize gender-based violence. Idriss (2021) contends that such responses fail to recognize the

victim as an agentic individual, instead reinforcing women's subordinate status within the social structure. These patterns illustrate how digital spaces often function as extensions of broader patriarchal systems.

The case of Ai Kirishima highlights how digital discourse operates as a site for the construction and reinforcement of gendered meanings. Through the lens of representation and Feminist Media Theory, it becomes evident that women are often portrayed as passive objects, with their identities reduced to visual appeal and their agency undermined. Netizen responses—ranging from victim-blaming to objectification—reflect deeper patriarchal structures embedded in both media narratives and public discourse. These interactions are not isolated but form part of broader social practices that perpetuate gender inequality and normalize violence against women in digital spaces. Thus, online commentary serves not only as a reflection but also as a reproduction of dominant power relations shaped by gender bias.

### **Social Context and Discursive Domination**

Netizen comments on the Ai Kirishima case should not be seen as isolated responses but as part of broader social practices that reflect prevailing value systems and power structures. Avelino (2021) suggests that such interactions are rooted in societal norms and help reinforce dominant ideologies. Drawing on Fairclough's theory, Sutikno et al. (2025) argue that language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for constructing and maintaining power. In this light, victim-blaming, objectification, and defense of the perpetrator in online comments illustrate how digital discourse serves as a medium for reproducing patriarchal values. As noted by Neupane and Sharma (2025), the digital sphere enables collective legitimization of gendered power imbalances, revealing how social media becomes an extension of offline hierarchies and gender-based control.

This social practice illustrates symbolic control over women's bodies. Ellemers et al. (2019) highlight that women who appear in public, especially through visual media like cosplay, are frequently viewed as fair targets for judgment, criticism, and blame. Sharifzadeh and Brison (2024) argue that such discourse functions as a form of social control over female expression, where freedom is constrained by dominant moral, aesthetic, and power standards shaped by male perspectives. Sirri (2024) adds that women who diverge from these norms face heightened vulnerability to social sanctions, such as negative comments, verbal harassment, and the erosion of their legitimacy. These patterns reveal how public and digital spaces continue to reinforce patriarchal norms that restrict women's autonomy and regulate their visibility, especially when they challenge traditional gender expectations.

Discursive domination is also reflected in the media's role as an institution that shapes public perception. Sensationalized portrayals of the victim on social media influence how audiences interpret the case. Within Fairclough's framework, this represents a form of media practice that not only reflects but also reinforces dominant ideologies—specifically, patriarchal norms and societal bias against female victims. Rather than acting as a neutral platform, the media plays an active role in constructing narratives that legitimize violence and maintain gender-based hierarchies. Through its framing and language choices, the media contributes to the normalization of women's subordination and the justification of harmful attitudes toward them.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study provides a strong and relevant synthesis aligned with its objective to understand the representation of women in netizen comments regarding the murder case of Ai Kirishima. The analysis reveals that digital spaces continue to serve as arenas for reproducing patriarchal discourse, where women particularly cosplayers are positioned as passive objects within narratives of violence.

Through the categorization of comments into victim blaming, objectification, defense of the perpetrator, and expressions of empathy, it becomes evident that the dominant public discourse tends to marginalize women and obscure the perpetrator's accountability. This illustrates how social systems and media interact in shaping public perception, which remains heavily influenced by gender bias.

Theoretically, this research contributes to gender studies by integrating Feminist Media Theory, Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the dynamics of power in the representation of women within digital spaces. Practically, the findings underscore the urgency of promoting media and gender literacy, particularly within online communities, as well as the need for policy interventions aimed at strengthening content moderation to protect victims of online violence. The study also advocates for the development of gender-sensitive media and social policies to address the cultures of victim blaming and the objectification of women's bodies in digital media.

However, this study is limited in its data scope and generalizability, as the analysis focuses on a single case and purposively selected comments. Future research is encouraged to adopt more inclusive approaches, both methodologically and thematically. Methods such as digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, or cross-platform and cross-cultural studies could broaden the understanding of representation issues and gender-based violence in more diverse and complex digital contexts.

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