Objectification of female cosplayers in Indonesian digital communities: A case study of Ai Kirishima

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Article information	Abstract
Submitted: 2024-10-14 Revised: 2025-06-13 Published: 2025-06-24 **Keywords:** Cosplay, Gender, Media, Victim Blaming	The problem in this research lies in how the representation of female cosplayers in the case of Ai Kirishima reflects gender bias in digital spaces. Public comments demonstrate the normalization of victim blaming and sexual objectification, which reproduce gender inequality within pop culture expressions such as cosplay on social media. This study aims to analyze how netizens' comments on TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram reflect gender discourses that reproduce patriarchal values and justify violence against women, particularly in the context of objectification toward cosplayers in Indonesia's digital space. This research employs a qualitative method using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine 120 selected comments. The data were thematically coded and interpreted across three levels textual, discursive practice, and social context. The findings reveal that digital spaces reproduce patriarchal discourse, positioning women particularly cosplayers as passive objects within narratives of violence. Through comments characterized by victim blaming, objectification, defense of perpetrators, and limited empathy, the dominance of gender bias becomes evident, marginalizing women and obscuring perpetrators' accountability in public discourse. This study contributes to understanding how digital spaces function as arenas for the reproduction of patriarchy through the objectification of women. The findings enrich gender and digital media studies in Indonesia and encourage efforts to create more equitable, gender-sensitive, and violence-aware online spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of cosplay, short for "costume play," has become a vital part of modern popular culture, especially among younger generations in Asia and globally. Pushkareva and Agaltsova (2021) explain that cosplay is not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for expressing creativity and admiration for characters from anime, manga, video games, or films. Rahman et al. (2012) note that cosplayers embody the appearance and persona of these characters through costumes and performance. Li and Liu (2023) and Haque (2024) further argue that cosplay can serve as a means of identity expression, particularly in negotiating social and gender roles. However, behind its popularity lie overlooked social issues, particularly the treatment of female cosplayers. Studies by Yang (2022) and Tang et al. (2023) reveal that female cosplayers often face objectification, stereotyping, and harassment both offline and online. Liu and Mu (2022) and Berik et al. (2024) emphasize that revealing costumes are frequently used to justify harassment or victim blaming, reflecting patriarchal norms that objectify and control women's bodies.

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 (Rouse & Salter, 2021). 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 (Johnson et al., 2024), 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 (Yang, 2022; crazyforanimetrivia, 2024).

Most studies on cybersexual harassment against women focus on victims' experiences and forms of abuse on social media without examining how digital spaces reproduce gender bias through public discourse. Existing research generally highlights victimology and psychological impacts but rarely explores representation and meaning construction in netizens' responses to cases of violence. Moreover, studies on victim-blaming culture tend to address social perceptions in general without linking them to popular culture such as cosplay. The murder case of a cosplayer in China illustrates gender-based violence reinforced by public opinion and online comments that shift the blame onto the victim. Therefore, this study fills the gap by analyzing gender bias and victim-blaming through Feminist Media Theory and Stuart Hall's representation theory to understand how digital media shape perceptions of women as objects to be judged and blamed.

This study aims to analyze netizens' responses to the murder case of Ai Kirishima, which reflect gender bias and tendencies toward victim blaming. Through Feminist Media Theory and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, this research examines how public comments in digital spaces shape perceptions of women particularly cosplayers as objects to be observed, judged, and blamed, while simultaneously reproducing patriarchal discourse in online media. The study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to gender and digital media studies. Theoretically, it enriches the understanding of how gender bias and patriarchal discourse are reproduced in digital spaces, particularly in the representation of female cosplayers. Practically, the findings are expected to offer insights for society and policymakers in fostering a more equitable, gender-sensitive digital space that respects women's dignity.

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 how the victim was represented and how the incident was framed. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), enables researchers to uncover both latent and explicit meanings within qualitative data by organizing recurring themes. In this study, central themes such as the objectification of the female body, moral judgment toward women's behavior, and the distortion of victimhood were systematically identified and categorized. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), this method effectively traces how social narratives are constructed and sustained through language. For example, numerous comments questioned the victim's morality based on her cosplay appearance, while others implied she shared responsibility for the violence because of her online persona. These

discursive tendencies were further examined through Fairclough's framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As emphasized by Liu et al. (2023), textual analysis in CDA requires close attention to word choice, metaphors, syntax, and evaluative language that reflect ideological stances on gender, power, and blame.

At the levels of discursive practice and social context, this analysis explored how user comments were both shaped by and contributed to dominant cultural narratives and institutional ideologies. Discourse, as Tenorio (2011) explains, is inseparable from its socio-institutional context and constantly interacts with broader systems of meaning. On digital platforms, particularly in comment sections, this interaction becomes visible through the reproduction of patriarchal values. According to Khan and MacEachen (2021), social media spaces often accelerate the circulation of gender-biased discourse, reinforcing traditional power hierarchies. This dynamic is especially evident in cosplay communities, where female participants are frequently subjected to hypersexualization, moral judgment, and surveillance. As noted by Endendijk et al. (2019) and Duman (2023), digital cultures can normalize moral policing and victim blaming. By linking individual expressions to systemic discursive patterns, this study highlights the need for critical media literacy and gender-sensitive awareness to challenge and resist harmful narratives in online environments.

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, and to examine its implications for how society views women particularly those who express themselves actively in digital communities 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
TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Instagram Posts
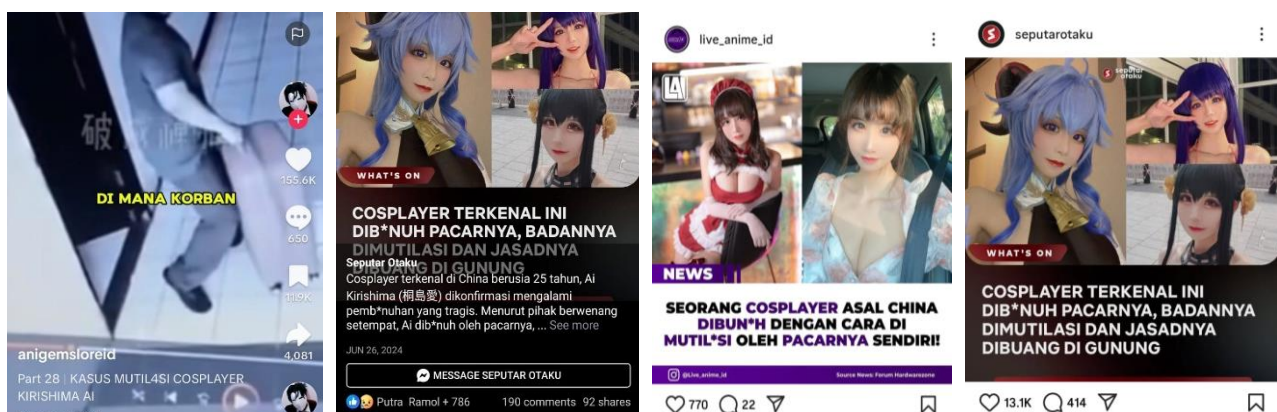
The images above depict four social media posts that were purposively selected as primary sources for collecting comments in this study due to their high levels of interaction and their use of visual content and narratives that captured public attention. The first post (P1), uploaded on TikTok by @anigemsloreid, 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) and fourth (P4) 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), 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) and diversity of platforms and narrative framing styles. 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
	Total			**1,276**	**120**

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 2
Number of Thematic Categories

No	Thematic Category	Number of Comments	Precentage	Example Comments (translated)
1	Victim Blaming	35	29,2%	• "Surprised, right? Same here. Just fat, unemployed, and probably has psychological issues." • "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." • "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." • "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." • "Cosplayer drama? Murdered, raped, abused, it's daily business. If you don't want to die a horrible death, stay away from cosplayers."
2	Objectification of Women's Bodies	28	23,3%	• "So pretty but likes a lump of pig." • "Yeah, that's why it's such a shame, she was really beautiful." • "Too bad, she had smooth skin… but choose the wrong boyfriend." • "She as pretty, though." • "Really embodied the roe of Ai Hoshino."
3	Defense of the Perpetrator	25	20,8%	• "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." • "I think the guy killed her out of heartbreak. He weighed like 150 kg, probably just her money source to buy costumes or whatever." • "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." • "The guy had been bottling up jealousy for months." • "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."
4	Empathy Toward the Victim	32	26,7%	• "It's really sad… she was already stabbed to death in the anime, and now in real life she was mutilated." 🙁 • "Kirishima: 'Thank you for finding my body,' to the hiker." 🙁 • "So sad, she was actually really pretty."

- "What a misfortune—ended up meeting someone mentally unstable."
- "So tragic… she died in such a brutal way."

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 3

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 horrifically, 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 (Mannarini et al., 2023). 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 (Borah et al., 2023). 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 in netizen comments can be examined through Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, which views meaning as constructed rather than reflected. As Omar (2023) explains, representation operates through language and discourse, shaping how social identities are perceived. This aligns with Platonov's (2024) argument that meaning emerges within socio-cultural structures permeated by power and gender dynamics. The comments analyzed reveal that female cosplayers like Ai Kirishima are portrayed as passive objects rather than active subjects, demonstrating how online discourse reproduces patriarchal meanings. Stokoe (2006) similarly notes that women are often positioned as passive participants, reinforcing traditional hierarchies. Furthermore, patterns of victim blaming and sexualized objectification identified in the comments echo Gravelin et al.'s (2019) analysis of societal tendencies to regulate and judge women's bodies. Collectively, these perspectives show that digital narratives around female cosplayers reproduce gendered ideologies, transforming online spaces into arenas of symbolic control.

In Hall's model of encoding and decoding, meaning is produced through negotiation between media and audiences rather than direct transmission. Gongane et al. (2022) interpret this process as one where media texts such as social media posts showing victims encode meanings that blend attractiveness with controversy, turning women into objects of both fascination and blame. When decoded, these representations are often read through dominant cultural codes that sustain gender hierarchies. As Suwana and Lily (2017) note, hegemonic readings reinforce patriarchal values that normalize unequal power relations. Ernanda (2023) expands this by arguing that such discourses sustain patriarchy in digital spaces through everyday language. This is evident in comments like "too bad, she was pretty" or "she probably used him," which reduce women's agency and align their worth with male perception (Walther, 2022). Lopes (2021) emphasizes that these interpretations deny women subjectivity, showing how Hall's framework reveals digital discourse as a site for reproducing patriarchal ideology.

Only a small portion of the comments demonstrate what Hall defines as oppositional readings interpretations that resist dominant misogynistic narratives by expressing empathy toward the victim. Vink et al. (2023) view such readings as discursive resistance that disrupts patriarchal meaning-making in digital spaces. Similarly, Arsawati and Bunga (2022) interpret empathetic responses as efforts to rehumanize Ai Kirishima, recognizing her as a victim deserving of dignity and justice. However, as Rasch (2021) notes, these perspectives remain marginal, overshadowed by dominant discourses that reproduce gendered hierarchies. Doiciar and Crețan (2025) argue that digital interactions perpetuate such norms by normalizing discriminatory language. This aligns with Aspinall et al. (2021), who identify online misogyny as a manifestation of entrenched patriarchal structures. As Sullivan (2020) asserts, these frameworks reduce women to visual symbols rather than autonomous subjects a pattern that, as Rodrigues (2020) insists, must be challenged to build a more gender-just digital culture.

Objectification and the culture of digital patriarchy

The objectification of female cosplayers in digital spaces exemplifies the persistence of patriarchal dominance within contemporary media culture. Gqola et al. (2024) interpret this phenomenon as the rearticulation of gendered hierarchies through digital platforms that normalize women's subordination within visual economies. In a similar vein, Santoniccolo et al. (2023) argue that online environments not only reproduce but also intensify these power relations, transforming women into aesthetic commodities rather than social agents. Lucas (2018) extends this critique by highlighting how women's bodies become fragmented signifiers, evaluated through dominant

standards of beauty and sexual desirability rather than personhood. Chan et al. (2024) further emphasize that such visual framings dehumanize women by privileging appearance over subjectivity. This is evident in comments like "what a pity, she had smooth skin" or "so pretty but into a lump of fat," illustrating how audiences commodify female bodies (Ma & Wang, 2021). As Demirhan and Çakır-Demirhan (2015) contend, these discursive patterns construct women as passive visual objects to be consumed, reinforcing the asymmetry of gendered power within digital representation.

Feminist Media Theory posits that media is not a neutral vehicle of information but an active site where patriarchal ideologies are constructed and sustained. Kalavathy and Professor (2024) interpret media particularly social media as cultural apparatuses that circulate idealized images of femininity women as visually pleasing, desirable, and available for consumption. Within this mediated framework, Melea et al. (2019) observe that female cosplayers, despite their creative and performative agency, are often confined within gendered narratives that distort their artistic intent. Nichols (2019) extends this critique by arguing that media representations frequently strip female cosplayers of their identities as creators, reframing them through the lens of sexualization that privileges the male gaze. Naraindas et al. (2024) further emphasize that this process entrenches a representational hierarchy where women's bodies are foregrounded over their voices and creativity, revealing how digital media reproduces patriarchal power under the guise of aesthetic appreciation and popular culture engagement.

In digital spaces, women's objectification is amplified by platform architectures that privilege visualization and performativity. Shahbaznezhad et al. (2022) interpret social media design as inherently gendered, emphasizing visual engagement that situates women particularly cosplayers at the core of public gaze. Metzler and Garcia (2023) expand this by arguing that algorithmic systems reinforce such exposure, rewarding visibility while neglecting context or creative intent, thereby heightening women's vulnerability to digital exploitation. This aligns with Kellie et al. (2019), who conceptualize digital patriarchy as an online structure that commodifies women's bodies through mechanisms of surveillance, sexualization, and moral policing. Bareket and Shnabel (2019) further contend that digital environments reproduce, rather than disrupt, masculine power, embedding patriarchal logic into everyday interactions. Consequently, female cosplayers experience a dual constraint: they must perform visual appeal to meet audience expectations while enduring sexist scrutiny (Nilsen et al., 2017). Sasaki and Baba (2024) interpret this contradiction as evidence of the unresolved tension between creative autonomy and structural gender oppression in digital culture.

The objectification of female cosplayers in digital spaces reflects the persistence and adaptation of patriarchal values within contemporary media. Ellis (2023) interprets this as the evolution of patriarchal ideology that reshapes itself through digital technologies and visual culture. Ert et al. (2024) argue that algorithmic visibility and user interaction perpetuate gender bias under the guise of technological neutrality, producing new forms of inequality. Lindner and Makarova (2024) highlight the need for critical media awareness to examine how such portrayals shape societal perceptions of women and reinforce symbolic subordination. From a structural standpoint, Al-Masri et al. (2023) contend that addressing this issue requires systemic intervention through regulatory frameworks and gender-sensitive digital literacy to ensure women's dignity, agency, and rights in online environments, transforming digital spaces from sites of objectification into arenas of empowerment and equity.

Victim blaming and the rationalization of violence

Netizen comments on the Ai Kirishima case reveal how meanings about women are constructed, circulated, and reinforced through representational processes. Mohamed (2023) interprets representation not as a mirror of reality but as an active process of meaning-making

involving production (encoding), interpretation (decoding), and the reproduction of discourse. Rocha (2013) similarly underscores that representation shapes collective understandings of gender, determining how femininity is socially perceived. Within this framework, Van der Harst and Angelopoulos (2024) argue that digital portrayals often position women such as Ai Kirishima as both visually desirable and morally contentious, creating ambivalent subjectivities. These mediated images, when decoded by audiences, manifest in comments that objectify the victim or excuse the perpetrator (Bevens et al., 2018). Consistent with Jacobs (2016) and Thapar-Björkert et al., (2016), such responses demonstrate how public discourse on gender-based violence is mediated by patriarchal cultural logics that normalize female subordination and moral scrutiny.

From the perspective of Feminist Media Theory, the portrayal of women in the Ai Kirishima case reveals their discursive positioning as passive objects rather than autonomous subjects. Study MassCom (2024) interprets this tendency as a manifestation of patriarchal narrative structures that deprive women of agency while sustaining traditional gender hierarchies. Awasthi (2017) extends this argument by emphasizing that the female body often becomes the focal point of sexualized discourse, reducing women's identities to aesthetic and erotic dimensions. Gervais and Eagan (2017) conceptualize this as a form of digital patriarchy, wherein media systems and audiences jointly reproduce gendered discourses that trivialize and normalize violence against women. Idriss (2021) further contends that such interpretations deny female victims subjectivity, reinforcing their symbolic subordination within social and cultural hierarchies. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that digital spaces operate not as emancipatory arenas but as extensions of patriarchal structures that continually shape how women are seen and judged.

The case of Ai Kirishima illustrates how digital discourse functions as a cultural arena where gendered meanings are constructed, negotiated, and reinforced. Durrani et al. (2022) interpret online interactions as sites where social ideologies are reproduced through everyday communication, revealing the persistence of structural inequalities. From the perspective of representation and Feminist Media Theory, Stuhler (2024) argues that women in media discourse are frequently positioned as passive figures, their identities reduced to visual appeal while their autonomy is erased. Malekabadi and Baboli (2022) extend this view by showing how netizen responses ranging from victim-blaming to objectification operate as discursive practices that sustain patriarchal dominance. Morales (2023) further emphasizes that such digital exchanges are part of broader cultural systems that normalize gender-based violence. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that online commentary not only mirrors but actively reproduces gendered power relations embedded in digital and social structures.

Social context and discursive domination

Netizen comments on the Ai Kirishima case should be understood not as isolated reactions but as manifestations of broader socio-cultural processes that sustain dominant value systems and power relations. Avelino (2021) interprets such digital interactions as extensions of social norms that legitimize and reproduce ideological dominance in everyday discourse. Through the lens of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Theory, Sutikno et al. (2025) argue that language operates as a mechanism of power shaping realities and reinforcing hierarchical structures. Within this framework, patterns of victim-blaming, objectification, and perpetrator defense in online comments exemplify how discourse becomes a vehicle for patriarchal reproduction (Van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Neupane and Sharma (2025) further contend that digital spaces facilitate the collective normalization of gendered inequalities, illustrating how social media functions as a continuum of offline hierarchies that perpetuate symbolic control over women.

This social practice reflects the operation of symbolic control over women's bodies within digital culture. Ellemers et al. (2019) interpret this phenomenon as an extension of gendered

surveillance, wherein women who appear in public particularly through visual media such as cosplay are constructed as legitimate subjects of scrutiny, judgment, and moral evaluation. Sharifzadeh and Brison (2024) further conceptualize such discourse as a mechanism of social regulation that limits women's expressive freedom through aesthetic and moral standards defined by patriarchal norms. Sirri (2024) extends this analysis by asserting that women who transgress these boundaries face intensified forms of social sanction, including verbal harassment and symbolic delegitimization. In line with these perspectives, Galizzi et al. (2024) argue that both public and digital spaces reproduce patriarchal logics that constrain women's autonomy and visibility, particularly when they challenge dominant gender expectations embedded in cultural discourse.

Discursive domination is further manifested through the media's institutional role in shaping collective perception. Tan and Lim (2020) interpret sensationalized portrayals of female victims as strategic mediations that guide audience interpretation rather than mere reflections of reality. Within Fairclough's critical discourse framework, such portrayals signify how media practices reproduce dominant ideologies by embedding patriarchal norms and systemic bias into everyday narratives (Austin, 2010). Dekker (2024) extends this argument by emphasizing that media institutions function as active agents in sustaining symbolic violence, legitimizing gender hierarchies through selective framing and linguistic emphasis. Comparatively, these perspectives reveal that the media is not a neutral channel but a discursive arena where gendered power relations are continually produced, circulated, and normalized, ultimately contributing to the societal acceptance of women's subordination and the justification of violence against them.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a concise yet comprehensive synthesis aligned with its objective to examine how women are represented in netizen comments on the murder case of Ai Kirishima. The analysis shows that digital spaces remain arenas for reproducing patriarchal discourse, where women especially cosplayers are often depicted as passive objects within narratives of violence. By categorizing comments into victim blaming, objectification, defense of the perpetrator, and empathy, the study reveals that dominant public discourse continues to marginalize women while obscuring perpetrator accountability. These findings highlight the interplay between social systems and digital media in shaping public perceptions of gender and violence, reflecting persistent gender bias and unequal power relations in online communication. Overall, the study underscores how cultural narratives embedded in social media discourse reinforce existing patriarchal norms and hinder gender-sensitive understandings of violence.

Theoretically, this research contributes to gender studies by integrating Feminist Media Theory, Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to explore power relations in women's representation within digital spaces. Practically, the findings emphasize the need to enhance media and gender literacy, particularly among online communities, to foster critical awareness of gendered narratives. The study also highlights the importance of policy interventions to strengthen content moderation and safeguard victims of online violence. Furthermore, it advocates for the formulation of gender-sensitive media and social policies to challenge and transform cultures of victim blaming and the objectification of women's bodies in digital media. By bridging theory and practice, the research offers valuable insights for promoting more equitable and inclusive digital communication.

However, this study has limitations in data scope and generalizability, as it focuses on a single case and purposively selected comments. Future research is encouraged to employ broader and more inclusive approaches, both methodologically and thematically. Utilizing methods such as digital ethnography, in-depth interviews, or comparative studies across platforms and cultures could enrich the understanding of gender representation and violence in diverse digital

environments. Expanding the dataset and incorporating multiple perspectives would allow for deeper insights into how online discourses about women evolve across contexts, cultures, and media ecosystems. Such approaches could contribute to developing more comprehensive frameworks for analyzing and addressing gender-based violence and inequality in digital communication.

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