



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Hijab Cosplay: A Fashion Trend in Popular Culture

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**ABSTRACT**

This research focuses on the phenomenon of hijab cosplay as a fashion trend in popular culture and the representation of identity among Muslim women who combine cosplay and hijab. This research uses qualitative method with perceptual phenomenology approach, which aims to understand how Communication Theory of Identity developed by Michael Hecht and his colleagues in analyzing the identity of a hijab cosplayer by understanding it through four layers: personal layer, endorsement layer, communal layer, and relational layer. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected hijab cosplayers, participant observation at cosplay events and observation of their activities on social media, and visual content analysis of photos and videos uploaded by participants on platforms such as Instagram. Triangulation of methods and data sources was used to increase the validity of the research findings, while member checking and peer debriefing were conducted to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. The results of this study show that the existence of hijab cosplay as a fashion trend in popular culture reflects a complex identity dynamic in which individuals successfully combine elements of religion and popular culture in their expression. Despite the challenges, hijab cosplayers have opened up a new space within the cosplay community, expanding the definition and acceptance of different forms of cultural expression. With the support of social media, this trend continues to grow, contributing significantly to intercultural dialogue and inclusivity in the global community. Therefore, the use communication theory of identity is very useful in understanding the identity formation process of hijab cosplayers in depth.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades, popular culture has become a dynamic platform for expressing individual identity and creativity. One form of popular culture that has experienced rapid growth is cosplay, which is a combination of the English words *costume play* (Ohsawa, n.d.). Cosplay describes the activities of young people who wear costumes in the style of characters in comics or Japanese comics, anime or Japanese cartoons (Bastian, 2019).

Cosplay itself has evolved into a global phenomenon, attracting people from all over the world, all walks of life and creating a diverse and inclusive community (Lamerichs, 2013). Indonesia is one of

the countries affected by this Japanese popular culture (Firdaus, 2023). Emerging in the early 1990s, Cosplay was present in several Japanese-themed festivals called Jejepangan festivals. One of them is Nihon Matsuri, which features a lot of Japanese pop culture (Naufal, 2024). These Cosplay festivals slowly introduced Japanese traditions and culture, ranging from food, entertainment (movies), games, and of course fashion (Lunning, 2013). Amazingly, cosplay can influence people's lifestyles, especially young people from food, entertainment, and fashion (Bastian, 2019).

Amidst the rise of the cosplay phenomenon, a unique subculture has emerged, namely hijab cosplay (Rastati, 2020a). Hijab cosplay is a practice in which individuals, especially Muslim women, wear costumes of fictional characters while adhering to the hijab dress code (Rastati, 2015a). This subculture not only reflects creativity and love for Japanese popular culture, but also demonstrates the ability of hijab cosplayers to navigate their religious and cultural identities in a global context (Kurnia, 2018a).

Hijab cosplay does not limit itself in portraying a character (Muhlisian et al., 2022a). Creative expression in wearing a costume and attending cosplay events can be an interesting experience for hijab cosplayers (Rastati, 2017b). Hijab cosplayers compete in trying to establish their own preferred identity when engaging in cosplay, as there are many questions about what hijab cosplayers actually gain when they wear the costume (Hasba, 2022a).

*Cosplayers find inspirations from different outlets and genres, meaning that a cosplayer has their own preferences when choosing a character* (Kroski, 2015). Cosplay hijab finds inspiration from a variety of sources ranging from science fiction, comic books, Japanese animation, television, movies, video games, and even from a work of literature (Kawamura, 2023). Most of them choose characters that they feel have special resonance or represent aspects of their personality that they want to convey, or simply choose characters based on the costumes they want to wear (Pratama, 2021). Some hijab cosplayers even try to recreate the character's costume as accurately as possible, down to the smallest detail by adding a new perspective to the costume (Rastati, 2017a).

Hence, the advent of hijab cosplay provides an opportunity for Muslim women to express themselves creatively while adhering to religious rules (Zine, 2014). Hijab cosplay also allows them to fully participate in the cosplay community, which is often dominated by characters and costumes that do not comply with the hijab dress code (Taylor & Jasmine, 2016). By modifying their costumes and adapting their favorite characters, hijab cosplayers create a new identity that combines elements from both the religious world and the popular culture world (Venus, 2017).

This study offers a number of insights that can be further explored to enhance the existing literature on hijab cosplay and identity representation in popular culture. A notable limitation of the extant literature is the dearth of research examining the specific role of social media in shaping the identities of individuals engaged in hijab cosplay (Buckingham, 2007). Although this study has demonstrated the considerable impact of social media platforms such as Instagram, there remains a dearth of knowledge concerning the precise mechanisms through which these platforms shape self-representation and social interactions within the cosplay community.

## LITERATUR REVIEW

### Communication theory of identity

To read the phenomenon of hijab cosplay, researchers use communication theory of identity as a tool to dissect how identity becomes a link between individuals with other individuals and their

environment, while communication is the link that allows this relationship to occur (Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

Michael Hecht and colleagues in (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010) combines three contexts namely: individual, communal and public. Hecht also added that identity is a collection of codes (in the form of symbols / words that identify a person / object that is in diversity. In (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010) explains that identity is also able to be a source of motivation and life expectations and has lasting power. Although identity tends to be maintained, it must still develop from time to time. So, it takes communication as a tool to shape identity and change its mechanisms. This is because identity is formed by social interactions between individuals with one another, so that there is a reaction and views from others regarding the meaning of the identity (Soliz & Colaner, 2017).

While (Castells, 2011) in his book the power of identity, states that the search for identity collectively and individually is the fundamental source of meaning. Castell provides several points to describe more fully the aspects of identity, namely the source of meaning and one's experience; the process of meaning construction based on a set of cultural attributes; and the meaning associated with visual experience when someone is in a place so that a visual image of the place is formed. In other words, identity functions to organize and manage meaning, which is closely related to the process of internalizing values, norms, goals, and ideals (Richards, 1991).

Hecht in (Kuiper, 2021) explains that the communication theory of identity divides individual identity into four layers, namely: (1) *Personal Layer* talks about how an individual sees himself consisting of feelings and ideas about who he really is, (2) *Enactment Layer* talks about how other individuals know his identity based on what he does, has, and how he acts, (3) *Communal Layer* talks about how individual identity is shaped by a larger community, starting from the emergence of a sense of attachment and individual connection to a group or community which can trigger a stronger sense of belonging to a shared identity. Finally (4) *Relational Layer*, talks about who the individual is and what his/her relationship with other individuals is, and how the individual's identity can be recognized as part of the group by the general public.

### **Pop-culture theory**

Theories of media and culture are believed to be the best development to specifically explain a concrete phenomenon within the context of history and contemporary society (Arviani, 2013). Thus, to critically interrogate contemporary media culture, we must engage with the study of how cultural industries produce artifacts in a particular way that will then reproduce social discourses that are key to conflict and struggle. This involves how popular texts such as Rocky or Rambo movies, rap music or Madonna, police series on television, or advertisements, news and discussions in the media, all things that articulate ideologies in a certain way help to reproduce dominant social forces and serve certain interests, or as resistance to dominant forces in society and culture that will produce the opposite effect (Storey, 2021).

### **Hijab cosplay**

Cosplay itself comes from the combination of two English words, namely costume and play. The term is used to describe an activity of young people who use costumes in the style of characters in Manga or Japanese Comics, and Anime or better known as Japanese Cartoons (Rastati, 2020b). Hijab or Al-Hijab comes from the word hajaban which means "cover", because it refers to a covering device. However, not all coverings are said to be hijab. In Islam itself, Hijab is a form of regulation on Islamic dress that is allowed to be used by its followers, with the aim of covering the aurat (Arisanti, 2015).

Hijab cosplay is a practice where individuals, especially Muslim women, dress up as fictional characters while adhering to the rules of wearing hijab (Juliansyahzen, 2023) (Rastati, 2015b). This subculture not only reflects creativity and love for Japanese popular culture, but also demonstrates the ability of hijab-wearing cosplayers to navigate their religious and cultural identities in a global context (Kurnia, 2018b).

Hijab cosplay does not limit itself in describing a character (Muhlisian et al., 2022b). Creative expression in wearing costumes and attending cosplay events can be an interesting experience for hijab cosplayers (Rastati, 2017c). The hijab cosplayers are competing to build their own identity choices when engaging in cosplay, as there are many questions about what hijab cosplayers actually have when they wear the costume (Hasba, 2022b).

## **Popular culture**

Popular culture is a culture that was born by the will of the media. This happens because the media has produced all kinds of popular culture products whose results have been disseminated through global media networks, which have been unwittingly absorbed by society (Habsari, 2015). If simplified, popular culture can be interpreted as a culture that has a tendency to use and combine basic materials that are found to be transformed based on signs. Innovation and creativity are one of the characteristics that are the basis of modern humans today. Popular culture has blurred boundaries and a high degree of flexibility (Sarinastiti & Merdiana, 2022).

## **Fashion trends**

Fashion is an artifactual message displayed through the appearance of the body. Where clothing in the form of clothes will be seen as soon as someone meets each other face to face. Even when the two have not even greeted each other. According to Kefgan and Touchie in (Trisnawati, 2016), clothing conveys a message, the clothes seen before the sound heard by clothing are always related to certain behaviors. This is often seen in everyday life, where we often judge people by their physical appearance, especially what is shown from how they dress.

The term fashion itself is actually familiar in everyday life. Because it is often identified with fashion or clothing, although what is actually said to be fashion is everything that is trending in society (Wicaksono & Maryana, 2021). Fashion is also related to the element of novelty, which is why fashion tends to be short-lived and there is no eternal nature. And because what tends to move and change all the time is fashion, then fashion is often associated with fashion, although as long as there is something new about something that involves artifacts of many people's pleasure, that can become fashion (Istiani, 2015).

Fashion, especially fashion, is a side of people's lives which is currently important as one of the indicators for the emergence and development of lifestyles. Fashion is something that is often synonymous with fashion, even though the definition of fashion can actually include all things related to jewelry, style and clothing (Wicaksono & Maryana, 2021).

Fashion trends do not only occur on the international fashion stage, but can also originate from subcultures, social media, celebrities and influencers. They often reflect the changing tastes and values of society at a given time. However, it's important to remember that fashion trends are temporary and often change quickly. While some trends may last for a longer period of time, many others only last a short while before being replaced by a new trend (Trisnawati, 2016).

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

This research is a qualitative study using descriptive qualitative research using the Perception Phenomenology approach, where the researcher acts as a key instrument in describing a phenomenon in depth and detail, focusing on the experiences, views, and meanings given by the research subject (Creswell, 2012).

Researchers conducted in-depth interviews with hijab cosplayers, and made direct observations of the environment and participated in cosplay activities (Huberman, 2014). In the process of analyzing this hijab cosplay, researchers used communication theory of identity. This theory is used for how identity is a link between individuals with other individuals and their environment, while communication is the link that allows these relationships to occur (Hecht & Phillips, 2021).

As for the analysis process, the researcher conducted a number of stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and ended with drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2014).

### Communication theory of identity framework

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## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Cosplay community

A cosplay community is a group of people who share an interest and hobby in the art of cosplay, which involves dressing and acting as characters from anime, manga, movies, video games and comics (Lamerichs, 2013). Members of this community often gather to share knowledge, skills, and experiences related to costume creation, make-up, and character performance (Upshaw, 2021). They also often organize or attend events such as conventions, cosplay competitions, and photoshoots, where they can show off their costumes, meet other hijab cosplayers, and interact with fans who share similar interests. In addition, the cosplay community is also a place to build friendships, social networks, and creative collaborations among its members (Bainbridge & Norris, 2013).



**Figure 1: Hijab coplay gallery community**

Hijab Cosplay Gallery is one of the hijab cosplay communities in Indonesia. This community consists of cosplayers who use hijab cosplay in accordance with what is presented in **Figure 1**. Based on the results of an interview with R, an observer and senior cosplay in Indonesia, hijab cosplay began to be recognized long before the Covid-19 pandemic, to be precise around the 2010s in Bandung, it started from these hijabers wearing wigs, but still using the hijab inside when cosplaying. This is quite common among hijabers who want to maintain their identity while enjoying the hobby of cosplay. In addition, the way they adapt a character to be played is done in a more creative way, often combining a wig and hijab, or even replacing the wig with a modified hijab to resemble the character's hair. Thus, these Muslim women can still express themselves through cosplay without having to give up their hijab, and make hijab cosplay an inclusive and diverse form of expression regardless of ethnicity/race, religion.

### Cosplay online community



**Figure 2: Hijab cosplay gallery official instagram account**

Hijab Cosplay Gallery itself was established in 2014, this community aims to show that cosplay can be enjoyed and adapted by various communities without sacrificing their cultural or religious

identity. In addition, Hijab Cosplay Gallery has an official Instagram account with the username **hcg\_hijabcosplay** which has 2,972 followers according to what is presented in **Figure 2**. This community also displays the works of hijab cosplayers in mixing and matching their hijab and cosplay costumes according to current fashion trends. This community also combines the pop culture elements of cosplay with the values and identity of hijab, thus creating a unique blend between the two aspects (Lengauer, 2021). This community began to gain popularity on Facebook social media, before expanding to other social media, namely WhatsApp, which is used as a platform/media for members to discuss, share interests, and interact with each other regarding cosplay fashion and cosplay events that can be followed (Muttaqin, 2020).



**Figure 3: Hijab cosplay event**

This community regularly participates in cosplay events every 1-3 months in big malls in Jabodetabek. These cosplay events vary from cosplay fashion show (Coswalk), cosplay parade (Cosparade), or jejepangan festival as presented in **Figure 3**. These events are always well attended by cosplay fans of all ages, both male and female, children, teenagers and adults (Saeed, 2007).

### Hijab cosplay

Including a 31-year-old Muslim woman who works as a private employee in Jakarta, FS. Based on the results of the interview with FS, the researcher found out that FS has the stage name Lina Freya/Locke Heart. She has been doing cosplay since 2013 as a Hijab Cosplay. She has a great interest in Japanese culture such as anime and manga, and even finds pleasure in cosplaying, because FS thinks that through cosplay she can express herself freely and get recognition from people around her according to the identity she creates. This phenomenon can be explained using the Communication Theory of Identity, which describes how the identity of a hijab cosplayer can be formed through the interaction and communication she does, in the first layer, namely (Santosa & Yuliana, 2024):



**Figure 4: Cosplay hijab models**



## Personal layer

Individuals identify themselves. Where everyone has their own uniqueness in themselves. Therefore, individual identity is formed from this uniqueness (Hecht & Phillips, 2021). Cosplayers consider that their activities can hone their skills and creativity in fashion and make-up. Based on the interview with FS, the researcher found that the identity of a hijab cosplayer is often shown through the clothes, hijab and make-up used when portraying a character as presented in **Figure 4**. This identity is formed based on how they choose a character, explore the characteristics of the character, and change themselves to imitate the character both in terms of visuals and behavior. FS also feels that doing hijab cosplay helps her to increase her confidence in doing her cosplay hobby without taking off her hijab.

## Enactment layer

In this layer, we examine how a person's identity can be built through interactions with other individuals (Prinando et al., 2022). The researcher observed the views of other individuals towards FS's identity, including a cosplayer observer with the initials R who is often a judge in various cosplay events, where FS is a participant. Based on the results of the interview with R, R explained that FS is quite active in hijab cosplay, both on social media (Idaman & Kencana, 2021) and live cosplay events. R assumes that FS pays a lot of attention to the costumes she wears, from head to toe. In imitating a character, FS still uses her hijab as a substitute for a wig which of course the color of the hijab is adjusted to the color of the chosen costume so that it looks like the original costume. In addition, FS also pays attention to the details of using accessories in covering the part of her body that becomes aurat, namely the skin, which she disguises by using matching colored leggings/cuffs, so that it resembles the original costume. This makes others see her as a hijab cosplayer who is highly dedicated, but still maintains her Islamic identity. FS is also known as a friendly person and is often involved in various cosplay events, both events organized by Hijab Cosplay Gallery and other cosplay communities.



**Figure 5: Cosplay hijab community**

## Communal layer

In this layer, we examine how individual identities are formed not only through personal actions and perceptions, but also by traditions and social interactions within the cosplay community (Faisal et al., 2022). FS built a hijab cosplay community to connect with other hijab cosplayers and as a place/media to share knowledge, experience and support. Based on the interview results through Hijab Cosplay Gallery, FS can develop and strengthen her identity as part of the hijab cosplay community, she also does not hesitate to show her commitment and dedication in strengthening



relationships between Hijab Cosplay Gallery members both personally and communally through the Hijab Cosplay Gallery Instagram official social media account (Idaman & Kencana, 2021).

### **Relational layer**

In this last layer, the researcher tries to understand how FS's identity is recognized as part of the Hijab Cosplay Gallery by others (Jubba et al., 2022). FS's interactions and interpersonal relationships help her to shape her personal identity. Based on the interview results, FS felt that the relationships she built with other hijab cosplayers helped her to improve her personal skills and confidence. In addition, her role as leader of Hijab Cosplay Gallery, especially in managing the official social media account of Hijab Cosplay Gallery or organizing a hijab cosplay competition, builds the perception of Hijab Cosplay Gallery community members or followers of Hijab Cosplay Gallery's social media account about her as a leader and influential figure. This is similar to what was conveyed by K, a Cosplay senior who also tutors FS in organizing a cosplay-themed event. Emotional support from family also helps FS in overcoming challenges and maintaining her commitment to being a hijab cosplayer. The interpersonal relationship built by FS also strengthens her identity as a hijab cosplayer and makes her more valued as a leader or an active participant in the Hijab Cosplay Gallery Community.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results of this study show that hijab cosplay, as a phenomenon in popular culture, is a complex and dynamic form of identity expression. By combining cosplay with hijab, hijab cosplayers not only demonstrate their love for popular culture, but also navigate their religious and Islamic identities in a space often dominated by different aesthetic norms. Using the phenomenology of perception and the communication theory of identity (CTI) approach, this study reveals that hijab cosplayers' identities are formed through interactions that take place at four levels: personal, enactment, communal, and relational. First, at the personal layer, where hijab cosplayers interpret their self-identity based on individual beliefs and values influenced by religion and personal interest in cosplay. Second, at the enactment level, where they articulate this identity through costume modifications that comply with Islamic dress codes, which are then presented at cosplay events and on social media platforms. Third, at the communal level, where hijab cosplayers' identities are formed through participation in the cosplay community, where they interact with other cosplayers and a wider audience. These interactions often involve the negotiation and reinterpretation of cultural and religious values. Fourth, at the relational level, where interpersonal relationships, both with fellow community members and with people outside the community, play an important role in reinforcing or challenging constructed identities. This research also highlights the role of social media as an important platform for supporting and strengthening the identity of hijab cosplayers. Through social media, hijab cosplayers can share their work, find inspiration, and build supportive networks, allowing them to express their identities more openly and creatively. Moreover, the existence of hijab cosplay as a fashion trend in popular culture reflects the complex dynamics of identity, where individuals successfully blend elements of religion and popular culture in their expression (Sa'dullah & Samau'al, 2023). Despite the challenges, hijab cosplayers have opened up new spaces within the cosplay community, expanding the definition and acceptance of different forms of cultural expression. With the support of social media, this trend continues to grow and contribute significantly to intercultural dialog and inclusivity in the global community. This theory also helps us understand how hijab cosplayers can develop a deeper understanding of who they are. Based on this, the researcher recommends that future research expand the population to include hijab cosplayers from different countries and cultures. This will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how different social, cultural, and religious contexts influence the way hijab cosplayers' identities are formed and navigated. In addition, researchers could also explore how different geographical

conditions, such as urban and rural environments, affect the experiences and identities of hijab cosplayers.

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