

Research Article

## Women Empowerment Themes in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* Anime Series

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### Abstract

This content analysis of *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series determined the women empowerment themes exemplified by the main characters' appearance, language, personality, and behavior, and how they support or limit its emergence. Examining the 26 episodes of the anime series, 5 women empowerment themes are depicted: protective towards women, embodying leader attributes, providing guidance to others, presenting hegemonic masculinity, and depicting well-rounded characteristics and multifaceted roles. Both the main characters of the anime series exhibited their own expression of support for women empowerment. The female protagonist, Misaki Ayuzawa, depicted a refreshing and well-made character which is considered a breakthrough from the traditional portrayal of women in the artistic media. Takumi Usui, the male protagonist, is portrayed as an aid to Misaki and her goals. However, there are instances where he limited women empowerment through his inappropriate behavior. The results suggest that the portrayal of women in recent anime series breaks the long-standing stereotyped and traditional portrayal of women in an artistic medium.

**Keywords:** Anime, Content Analysis, Media, Pop Culture, Women Empowerment

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## Introduction

The abbreviation of the Japanese word *anime-shon* (アニメーション) refers to the word *anime* which means animation in English (Chan, 2017). The history of anime can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Horner et al., 2020). The popularity of this kind of screen production is considered a cultural phenomenon that grew exponentially from the 1970s until today. Anime embodies a lot of unexpected plots and interesting stories that invoke various emotions depending on what genre the anime series or movie is to the viewers. Due to its popularity, anime secured a place on the global stage and reached countries all around the world including the Philippines.

The Philippines and Japan have influenced each other's popular culture for centuries. It influenced each other's popular culture particularly Filipino representation and participation in Japanese media such as anime (Strom, 2020). As it was well-accepted by the general audience and relatively cheaper to acquire than other program formats, Filipino TV networks were quick to capitalize on its boom (Bravo, 2012). At present, anime has become something to look forward to, early in the morning.

According to the analysis by Gulati (2020), the Philippines is the third country where anime is most popular with over 56,195,052 viewers in 2020. It continues to impact and bring together anime enthusiasts, building groups that help spread this kind of screen production across the country with its distinct storylines and aesthetic animation styles. The emergence of anime has a widespread influence on the perception of people on social issues such as gender stereotypes and women's portrayal (Jessa, 2020).

Women have always been underrepresented in the context of media not just from Japan but from all around the world, resulting in the conduct of multiple feminist studies. The shift in traditional and stereotyped images of women can be seen through selected television shows and films (Angulo et al., 2019). However, the roles women portray in artistic mediums such as films are still conforming to a biased mold (Kinnunen, 2016). Consequently, the representation of women still has room for improvement not just in a single aspect but in all aspects of society.

In the past few years, the Philippines has shown better support for women's participation in politics, academic and professional excellence, sports, economics, and media. According to Gaur (2018), media is regarded as society's most essential instrument in modern times since it has the ability to reach a huge audience through mass communication and influence wherever it can. This is the reason why women's portrayal in the media must be studied to expose people to social issues around the world.

With the widespread use of new media, anime has quickly gained immense popularity, especially for its potential to deliver powerful messages and style of addressing social issues. According to Aziz et al. (2016), the influence of anime may change people's attitudes and behavior over the long term. As an example, female anime characters used to be drawn as weak, vacuous, and hyper-sexualized (Inuma & Lee, 2021) but with the shift of women empowerment in Japan, the anime industry started creating strong female protagonists. Consequently, the view of female character stereotypes among anime viewers changed over time.

The researchers chose *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series as the media content product to analyze because it is one of the most popular shoujo anime of the decade (Riviere, 2021) that depicts a strong female character which is appealing to both genders. Additionally, it has a distinct portrayal of women that cannot be seen in other anime since most female characters in Japanese animation tend to appear giddy, awkward, and submissive in their actions (Palit, 2022). Thus, this anime series was selected as the main source of data wherein the main characters' appearance, language, personality, and behavior were analyzed.

Japanese animation has become an influential tool in breaking down barriers and empowering the suppressed. Thus, this study aimed to analyze whether the content of the selected anime series promotes women empowerment and determine its emerging women empowerment themes.

The researchers also acknowledged the limited literature and studies in regards to women empowerment themes in media. Although women empowerment in media has been the focus of feminist media studies, its themes were evidently lacking. Hence, the researchers endeavored to address this gap by analyzing the emergence of women empowerment themes in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series.

## Objective

Generally, this study aimed to examine how women empowerment was represented in an anime series. This study also intended to determine the interpretation of the signs found in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series.

Specifically, it sought to ascertain the women empowerment themes portrayed by the main characters, Misaki Ayuzawa and Takumi Usui, based on their appearance, language, personality, and behavior. Also, how the main characters supported or limited women empowerment in the anime series was analyzed.

## Methods

This study utilized a descriptive research design, specifically content analysis. Through the characters' appearance, dialogues, and behavior, the researchers were able to identify women empowerment themes in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series.

The researchers used content analysis as the research method of this study for the reason that it is an easy-to-use and systematic tool for analyzing artistic mediums such as television series and films (e.g. anime series), which can provide a comprehensive and transparent description of the material's content.

The sources of data were the entire 26 episodes of the anime series *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* The following is the summary of the said anime series for better understanding:

Seika High, a renowned school with a student body consisting of irresponsible and immoral people, was once an all-boys institution but recently switched to accepting co-ed students. Misaki Ayuzawa decides to take action on her own to alter the school and give the girls a chance to feel safer in the hostile atmosphere because the female population still remains a minority despite the shift over the last several years. Misaki has developed a reputation among the male school population as an uptight, boy-hating demon tyrant while also becoming the first female student council president of the school. She has also established a reputation as a bright hope for the professors and other female students. She covers up the fact that she supports her family by working a part-time job at a maid café by having a tough personality. Unfortunately, her identity is quickly exposed when Takumi Usui, a popular student who can be a bit aloof, sees her after school in a maid outfit.

The gathered data were acquired from the online video sharing and social media platform, YouTube. To ensure consistency and validity in coding, the researchers applied intercoder reliability in this study. Intercoder reliability refers to the standard of measure of research quality (Zheng, 2011) and the degree to which two or more researchers agree about the coding of an item (Bryman, 2012). By using a cellphone or laptop, the researchers independently coded each of the episodes of *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series to ensure high intercoder reliability.

The researchers used a coding sheet specifically designed to respond to the needs of the study in determining the women empowerment themes in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series. The coding sheet was divided into three sections: the general description of *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* episodes, elements of the characters to be analyzed, and how the main characters support or limit women empowerment. The first section was designated for the description of the episodes of *Kaichou wa Maid-Maid-sama!* anime series, which included the episode number, title, synopsis, and the name of the character. The second section contained the main characters' elements to be observed (appearance, language, personality, and behavior). This section seeks to answer the first research problem of this study. In determining appearance, the researchers observed the facial and bodily features, and clothing of the two main characters. These visual indicators were adopted from the study of Angulo et al. (2019) and Zheng (2011).

The main characters' verbal manners such as dialogues were considered indicators of their language as adapted to the study of Angulo et al. (2019). The researchers listed down the dialogues and their context that have depicted women empowerment. For personality, the researchers adopted Zheng's (2011) modified set of codes that simplifies various attitudes of women portrayed in media. The guide consisted of eight indicators: self-governed/independent, dependent, optimistic, pessimistic, fashionable, constrained/reversed, aggressive, and quiet/soft/weak. For behavior, the indicators were adopted from Kinnunen's (2016) study that looked at behavioral patterns in fictional television. There are seventeen indicators in the list: ingenuity, incompetence, physical aggression, victim of physical aggression, verbal aggression, victim of verbal aggression, leadership, follower, rescuing (bravery), helpless, achievement, failure, asking for advice/protection, guidance given, object of reward, shows affection, and praises. The third section seeks to

provide an answer to the second research problem which intended to show how the main characters supported or limited the emergence of women empowerment.

The researchers watched each episode of the selected anime series individually. While viewing the anime series independently, they coded each episode using the designed coding sheet. After watching and coding individually, the researchers collated their coding sheets. Lastly, they did a thematization to determine the women empowerment themes present in *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series.

The coding sheet that was adopted from Angulo et al.'s (2019) indicators of visual appearance and language, personality indicators (Zheng, 2011), and behavioral coding patterns of Kinnunen (2016) was utilized by the researchers to determine the women empowerment themes present in each episode. The data were collected through the coding sheet and further analyzed by the researchers to determine the women empowerment themes of the anime series.

## Result and discussion

### Women empowerment themes portrayed by the characters

#### *Protective towards women*

In terms of appearance, Misaki Ayuzawa is portrayed as a female high school student who prefers to wear a comfortable style of clothing and rarely wears makeup. In an episode where Misaki was coerced to wear a revealing maid outfit, she was sexually harassed by the student council president of a rival school. This implies that a female character, especially under the age of 18, wearing an outfit that shows too much skin is viewed as degrading to women's portrayal in media. This supported the study of Chan (2017) which stated that costuming (skirts and dresses) and suggestive scenes were deemed as diminishing the portrayal of young women, especially since Misaki is only 16-year-old in the anime series. On the other hand, Takumi Usui, the male protagonist of the anime series, is shown as a 17-year-old, athletic, and good-looking character. He has shown protectiveness towards how Misaki is being visually perceived in the anime series. He protected Misaki from wearing revealing clothes and getting her body exposed.

In terms of language, Misaki and Takumi voice out their expression of protectiveness towards women. Misaki tends to be upfront whenever she is caught in a predicament or when her fellow females are put in danger. She confronts male perpetrators and directly points out their mistakes. Moreover, she defends her girlfriends verbally and threatens the male population. She stands by her values and protects her friends. Takumi also defends Misaki through her firm words and threatening phrases against the people who harass her. He would save her by de-escalating the dangerous situation.

The following dialogues best portrays Misaki's protective nature over females:

*Didn't I tell you to be careful with your words?! I won't let you off the hook if you make another girl cry again!"*

*"What's wrong with me protecting other girls?"*

*"Take the girls to a safe shelter fast!"*

*If any guy tries to come at you... I'll take care of him."*

Both characters portrayed aggressive personality in the anime series. Misaki uses her physical skills to save herself and the female population while Takumi is willing to fight to save and help Misaki. These findings imply that Misaki is not a female character who succumbs to stereotypical anime female characters. Women are commonly represented as less aggressive than men (Stoltzfus, 2014 as cited in Kinnunen, 2016) but in the case of Misaki, her role is portrayed as an aggressive and capable character. As for Takumi, ready to fight the bad guys harassing Misaki, it proves that women's vulnerability is used as an excuse for the protector's aggression (Stabille, 2009 as cited in Kinnunen, 2016). His aggression otherwise leads to Takumi wanting to protect Misaki from harm.

The aggressiveness of Misaki and Takumi exhibits their strong desire to protect women. Known as having a fierce personality, Misaki is most likely to get in physical situations. According to Scott (2014), there has been a noticeable increase in strong female protagonists who can fight crime and take out enemies rather than just good-looking sidekicks. Female protagonists who are shown to be physically active challenge the long-standing stereotypes of women who need to be saved. Even though Takumi, the primary male protagonist, rescued Misaki a lot of times, she is still undoubtedly capable of rescuing others and herself.

### ***Embodies leadership attributes***

In terms of appearance, Misaki shows her leadership attributes by wearing a white band around her arm, signaling that she is the school president. She wears this when a school event is happening. Takumi, on the other hand, has a natural leadership attribute when it comes to leading his fellow male students at Seika High School.

In terms of language, Misaki, being the student council president, has shown her leadership skills through commandeering and sorting out school issues. She applies her rational judgment during meetings. This skill is shown through her dialogues in the anime series:

*“In the presence of those guys who just do whatever they want, the females can’t help but endure in silence.”*

*“With this refreshing image, we can clear our reputation of being a savage and inferior school!”*

*“Let’s combine our powers and make this into a refreshing school festival!”*

Takumi automatically becomes the official representative on behalf of the male population because Misaki listens to his suggestions. Misaki initially rejected the male students’ ideas until Takumi spoke on behalf of them. This shows his authority as a respectable male student in the anime series.

For their personalities on-screen, they both depicted a strong sense of self-governed/independent nature. Misaki takes full responsibility for leading the student council and filling up what they lack. She often carries out inspections alone. Takumi is usually seen alone dealing with people, however, his dominance towards the male population leads people to respect him.

The behavioral indicators that were predominant in both characters were ingenuity and leadership. Both characters are competent in their field of expertise. Misaki excels in leadership and providing service while Takumi in sports and aiding Misaki. These findings imply that Misaki being elected as the student council president already shows her qualities for being a leader. She led all the events that occurred in Seika High, including the organizational meetings and the job of keeping the other student council members’ confidence boosted. When there is an issue regarding other schools, Misaki would settle it as soon as possible. Even with a lot of things to deal with, inside and outside the school, she never neglected her responsibilities as the student council president of Seika High. As for Takumi, his natural leadership skills arise whenever he is asked to represent the male population’s voice during council meetings. Moreover, he would instinctively direct his companions whenever he saw a group that lacked its leader figure.

### ***Provides guidance to others***

In terms of appearance, both Misaki and Takumi have shown their capabilities to provide guidance to each other and to other characters. In terms of Misaki, she has shown this attitude through her appearance as a student, older sister, and part-time maid. During school activities, she would lead her fellow students and provide guidance as to what they would do for the betterment of the school environment. At home, she would give advice to Suzuna, her younger sister, about the path she would take in the future. Misaki also provides guidance to the frequent customers of Maid Latte. With her maid outfit on, customers easily approach her and ask what her recommended menus are. In return, she would answer with grace and respect. On the other hand, Takumi is portrayed as someone who is natural at providing guidance to other people, especially Misaki. In some episodes of the anime series, he is seen wearing a matching work outfit with Misaki, and often giving advice about more efficient ways to communicate with males.

Both characters Misaki and Takumi have an authoritative tone when getting someone to do something. Being the student council president, Misaki easily expresses her desire to aid and guide her fellow students for the betterment of the school environment thus, resulting in smooth communication between them. On the other hand, Takumi gave comments and guidance to the café manager about making the parfait better because he used to be an on-call employee at the café.

*“I think it’s better if we split those who are in charge of the kitchen and the customers.”*

*“You don’t need to run away anymore.”*

*“Use a pointed spoon when putting the quenelles on top. I’m sure they’ll get better with some practice.”*

Misaki's combined independent and optimistic personality effectively communicates her desire to provide guidance to other characters. The findings for Misaki imply that women's roles are now beginning to improve as they are being portrayed as capable of making decisions independently based on their judgments and values. This portrayal of women in media supported the study of Burkett and Hamilton (2012) which stated that women are now beginning to be portrayed as active, independent, free, and empowered people. This shows a break from the stereotyped portrayal of women as nonprofessionals in media. On the other hand, Takumi is often seen giving guidance to Misaki whenever she is faced with difficult situations in multiple episodes. His guidance will eventually enlighten Misaki to do the best thing for the situation.

In terms of behavior, Misaki would candidly give advice to others as she wants them to realize the reality of the situation they are in. Takumi also possesses the same attitude, especially towards Misaki. He would carefully assess Misaki's problem and help her find a solution for it.

### **Presents hegemonic masculinity**

In terms of appearance, Misaki chose to wear masculine clothes aside from her school uniform and maid outfit at the café. In the anime series, she has mentioned that she only chooses cheap clothes and that being cute is not something she thinks about. Takumi, on the other hand, is a character who is not interested in make-up but his great sense of fashion was evident in the whole series. His wardrobe can be considered as masculine, drawing a lot of attention from both genders.

In Misaki's language, she asserts her dominance, not just as a woman but as a person, through words while Takumi has an urge to support Misaki through supporting her words as a man and a lover. This shows positive hegemonic masculinity among the main characters.

*Misaki: "And I am the first female student council president within such an environment."  
"Now that I'm the president, I'll rule over the guys with an iron fist."*

Known for her daunting personality, Misaki has shown her dominance by displaying her masculinity in the anime series. She prefers to take charge of situations on her own to give the idea that she is independent as a school president. She also learned Aikido (a modern Japanese martial art) to protect herself and others. Misaki also showed her masculine exterior and has always been good at carrying heavy things. Takumi, with his masculine physique, willingly helps Misaki in fighting bad guys and scaring them away. He would pop here and there and would help Misaki from time to time.

In terms of the characters' behavior, both depicted support for women empowerment. On one hand, Misaki exhibited actions and behavior typically attributed to male characters such as decisiveness, self-sufficiency, and standing up for one's and others' rights as a way to empower herself as a woman. On the other, Takumi showed his masculinity by empowering Misaki. These findings imply that masculinity can empower women too. Misaki's masculinity shows her dominance and that she is not just some stereotypical female character. According to Kinnunen (2016), female characters who were considered "masculine" were frequently shown as "inappropriate and unappealing women" but in Misaki's case, her independence builds up her strong and empowered character. Takumi, on the other hand, displayed his masculinity by giving what Misaki needed.

### **Depicts well-rounded characteristics and multi-faceted roles**

Both the characters displayed a wide array of characteristics and portrayals through their appearances. For Misaki, she is shown as a strict student council president and at the same time, a hardworking part-time maid employee at a café. She also tends to go outside the box and dresses as a guy for good intentions. Whenever there is an event at the café, she also does costume playing for it. On the other hand, Takumi is shown as a respectable model student and at the same time, having a soft spot for Misaki. He is portrayed as a charming, fashionable, and model student. He could easily make the gaze of the female population of Seika High follow his movements and the male population admire his athleticism. The appearance of both characters depicted their dynamic roles in the anime series, which has shown their different characteristics regarding each role.

In terms of language, both characters have shown their mature roles by developing a sense of support for women empowerment as the episodes progress. They both prioritize women's rights in all contexts. Misaki

always prioritizes women's rights and makes sure that the female school population gets treated equally.

*"In the presence of those guys who just do whatever they want, the females can't help but endure in silence."*

*"You guys just do whatever you like and do things that girls hate without considering their feelings."*

*"I guess I'm a girl who lacks self-awareness as one, or just too manly, eh?"*

*"Stop looking down on me!"*

*"I want to make it a place where the girls can be at ease."*

With the multifaceted roles of Misaki and Takumi, the researchers have coded various contrasting characteristics such as self-governed/independent, dependent, aggressive, and quiet/soft/weak. These show how round the characters were, with the set of contrasting personalities they exhibited in the anime series. The findings for Misaki's personality traits negated the study of Collins (2011) which stated that the portrayal of women is often in a circumscribed and subordinated manner. Misaki's character is a breakthrough in the traditional image of women in artistic media. These findings imply that women's portrayal is now adapting to improvements as the recent roles they have today are as significant as those of their male counterparts. Misaki's multifaceted roles in the anime series suggested that women's roles in media can go beyond traditional and stereotyped manners such as nonprofessionals, housewives, and sexual gatekeepers (Collins, 2011; Mehta, 2020).

Furthermore, both the characters' behavior depicted how well-made their characters were. With a wide set of behavioral patterns, both Misaki and Takumi's characters can be structured as round characters. Misaki comes up with solutions to problems regarding school events and issues while Takumi comes up with ideas to make dangerous situations de-escalate.

### **How the characters support or limit women empowerment**

#### ***Supporting women empowerment***

Misaki Ayuzawa has transparently shown her support for women empowerment by valuing the inclusivity of female students in Seika High. She gave the female students the freedom to speak out for themselves as she asked their opinions regarding the activities in school, inciting inclusivity regarding decision-making. She also empowers women through her role as the first female student council president of Seika High, proving that a woman can lead and change the bad image of the school.

During the mountain classes, she protected her friends as well as the female students from harm when male students who were not in their sane state were about to attack them. In addition, she showed and proved her strength as a female in the whole series. Being the student council president, Misaki has to handle a lot of paperwork, events, as well as patrolling inside the school. On top of that, she does not fail to perform well in her academics and in her part-time work.

These findings imply that a female character's self-awareness of her feminine capabilities can empower not just herself but also other women. These can also establish her major role in the society. These findings supported the study of Mehta (2020) which stated that "a woman herself empowers her by treating herself worthy and competent in the society."

Takumi Usui has shown his support for women empowerment by displaying acts of service for Misaki. These services include helping her out of unfavorable situations, encouraging her to be herself, and believing in her capabilities as a woman. Takumi would be the first person who helps and supports her ideas. When Takumi discovered Misaki's secret of working part-time at a maid café, he advised her that her strength and intelligence as a woman will not change even if she wears a maid uniform. He also kept her secret, knowing that the male population at their school would doubt her image.

Takumi was the first male classmate who stepped up and helped Misaki and the girls in their makeshift café during the school festival. Even in hindsight, he would protect Misaki from being taken advantage of. He would praise Misaki for being a great leader and example to their fellow students. For him, her actions will never be a disappointment because he knows that all she does is for the betterment of herself and others.

Another display of support for women empowerment by Takumi is when he nurses Misaki's injuries whenever she gets hurt. He would look after her in the school clinic and ensure that she rested well. He also

helped Misaki's mother when her apples fell out of her basket and helped an elderly woman cross the busy street. These actions show Takumi's respect for women by offering them help whenever they need it.

### ***Limiting women empowerment***

Contrary to Misaki's character as someone full of boldness and courage, she limits women empowerment by having doubts about her confidence regarding her capabilities as a woman. In episode 4 of the anime series, Misaki Ayuzawa downgraded herself for a moment by saying that she either lacks self-awareness or is just too manly for a woman. She also had negative opinions about herself just because she was working as a maid. Since Misaki holds great pride in being the student council president, she claims that because she works as a maid, she is already considered unideal in society.

In episode 19, where Misaki was paying back Takumi from all of his help, she calls herself useless. She doubted her own actions and efforts, considering them as somehow lacking. Moreover, when Misaki was not able to comprehend why girls like Takumi Usui, she unintentionally downgraded the standards of the female students in Seika High saying she did not understand how they think at all. There are some unavoidable moments where Misaki needed to call one of her companions, "bitch", a term that downgrades a woman, just to save the student council vice president. She also curiously stalked Takumi knowing herself how disturbing and creepy it is when someone follows you around.

The character of Takumi is portrayed as someone who speaks his mind freely and acts rashly based on his feelings. To get Misaki's attention, he would resort to touching her inappropriately without her consent and making sexual remarks. This has put her in an uncomfortable situation because it is against the feminine values of Misaki. Contrary to his support for Misaki upon discovering her secret, Takumi is often seen teasing and using her secret to his advantage. In the earlier episodes of the anime series, he would tease Misaki if she could be his "personal maid", making her frustrated and overthink his intention. On another occasion, he told her that he was keeping her secret for his "own pleasure", a thought that did not sit well with Misaki.

Multiple times in the series, Takumi would make inappropriate remarks, such as sexual innuendos and unnecessary comments about her body, towards Misaki. He would ask her to strip, using excuses just to see her take her clothes off. In a scene where they are the only ones in the area, Takumi asks Misaki if he can violate her, which angered Misaki, making her yell at him. When he was feeling jealous, he suddenly grabbed Misaki and put a kiss mark on her back without her consent, violating her boundaries as a woman. In another situation towards the end of the anime series, he made a comment about her chest being "flat as a board".

Opposite to his belief in Misaki's values, Takumi would occasionally doubt her abilities just because she is a woman. He would question Misaki and finalize with, "You're a girl after all." In the last episode of the anime series, he kept telling her not to be a "hindrance" and not to drag him down when they were playing a game. Most of his actions are contradictory to how he supports women empowerment. Despite being portrayed as a character with a decent upbringing, there are a lot of instances wherein his character limits women empowerment, especially towards the female protagonist, Misaki Ayuzawa.

### **Conclusion**

*Kaichou wa Maid-sama!*, a 2010 Japanese anime series, showcased a positive portrayal of women portrayal and exhibited women empowerment themes. Through the analysis of the appearance, language, personality, and behavior of the main characters, Misaki Ayuzawa and Takumi Usui, five women empowerment themes emerged: protective towards women, embodies leader attributes, provides guidance to others, presents hegemonic masculinity, and depicts well-rounded characteristics and multifaceted roles.

The researchers have determined various women empowerment themes based on the two main characters, Misaki Ayuzawa and Takumi Usui. Their appearance, language, personality, and behavior were examined throughout the 26 episodes of the anime series. Furthermore, the researchers investigated how the characters support or limit women empowerment with the consideration of the principles of Semiotics.

Based on the collated coding sheet, the researchers have gathered five women empowerment themes through the main characters' elements. These emerging women empowerment themes by the main characters from the anime series were: protective towards women, embodying leader attributes, providing guidance to others, presenting hegemonic masculinity, and depicting well-rounded characteristics and multifaceted roles.



These emerging themes were based on the coding indicators of Angulo et al. (2019), Zheng (2011), and Kinnunen (2016).

The anime series has shown a strong sense of support for women empowerment through its main characters. Misaki, the female main protagonist, portrays a strong and intelligent role that empowers women on and off the screen. Her role was considered fresh from the traditional image of women seen through artistic media. Takumi also represented a great character, aiding Misaki in her goals. However, he limited women empowerment through his inappropriate behavior towards Misaki.

Despite having a minor stereotypical portrayal of how women used to be represented, *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* anime series discussed a daring step towards the improved portrayal of women in the media. Through the 26 episodes of the anime series, women empowerment can be vividly seen and recognized. Since the anime series was a hit-release in 2010, more women protagonist portrayals in Japanese animation were then seen with improvements.

While this research highlights the importance of extending the thread of conversation on the influence and potential of media and popular culture, specifically anime, in creating, changing, and/or influencing a human society, several areas emerged as potential future research as the study went on. Given that *Kaichou wa Maid-sama!* is an anime series that was adapted from its manga (comics) and completed in 2018, future studies may be inclined to keep scrutinizing the manga in its entirety. It is recommended to carry out a similar investigation to determine any potential themes of women empowerment in the manga series and how the characters could promote or hinder it. Furthermore, the study analyzed an anime series, commonly referred to as a motion picture animation. Distinctive research with another popular anime in the *Shounen* genre (anime and manga that is targeted toward a male youth audience) would be intriguing. It would be fascinating to know how the characters would encourage or restrict women empowerment and if there will be pervasive themes in it. Shounen anime series is preferable since this genre tends to cater more to male audiences.

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