



# Examining Sleeper Effect Resulted from Text and Photograph: A New Perspective on Exemplification Theory

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**Abstract.** The presentation of specific cases serving as an illustration for more significant phenomena has a long history in journalism. Although most publications report some form of exemplification effect, it is unknown whether the sleeper effect caused by exemplification will prevail and drive risk perception and behaviour intention in one risky situation. Additionally, the specific research has not been applied and tested into the Indonesian population. This research focuses on the sleeper effect created using exemplification theory to investigate its effects on downstream risk perceptions and behaviour intention. The exemplars which posit high-risk text and photograph representation from the partial case of COVID-19 phenomena in two sub-district areas in South Jakarta were used as independent variables. Evenly selected women and men of 90 participants were randomly divided into three groups based on stimuli given; manipulated photograph exemplar, text exemplar, and combined photograph and text exemplar before answering a post-test questionnaire. Fourteen days later, another post-test for each group was conducted to probe into the sleeper effect and measure its strength. The results indicated that sleeper effect in exemplification did exist and grew stronger after fourteen days to participants who exposed to photograph exemplars towards their risk perception and participants who exposed to photograph, and text and photograph exemplars towards their behavior intention.

**Keywords:** exemplification · photograph exemplar · text exemplar · sleeper effect · persuasion

## 1 Introduction

Empirical data indicates that media are strong tools of public opinion formation to the point of people's perceptions of the world are mainly formed via media content [1–3]. Journalists define events in a simplified, schematic, and even inaccurate manner while reporting on news and complicated phenomena so that audience members comprehend them in a certain way [4]. Through tales including exemplars that depict an item or event, media or other representations may impact audience comprehension of the social environment [5] according to exemplification theory. The theory addresses representatives

of self-witnessed experiences occurred directly or indirectly that alter and construct the set of beliefs towards an issue or phenomena through aggregated exemplar. Revolves in cognitive heuristic, the exemplars as message appeal permit oneself to group and associate himself with those who possess similar focal characteristic in a group [6]. Message appeal in an exemplar shown as the vividness of episode leads to higher recognition and involvement than vague message or numerical or general statement [7].

The sleeper effect is defined as a real influence generated through memory impact in a situation where persuasiveness grew over time as a result of a communication source's discounted credibility, which is then excused and the persuasiveness' substance remains [8–13]. The effects of a communication on participants' views is often thought to be strongest soon after the communication and to fade with time [14]. Examining the sleeper effect while referring to message source credibility (the media) will help to pinpoint whether this effect is existing or non-existing during risky situation especially when the discounted cue existed or non-existed (in this study). The influence of message perceived could differ from actual influence due to human memory effect while the acceptance cue verifies the message's credibility, such as a reliable source.

Furthermore, when it comes to attitudes, perceptions and behaviors, media may have a significant impact which may be brief or long-lasting; immediate or delayed [15]. Although the effect of the independent impact of pictorial and verbal exemplars has been well documented [5, 16, 17], competing for the sleeper effect of text, photograph and combined text and photograph exemplars that direct risk perception and behavioral intention as the result of its sleeper effect in risky situation of COVID-19 pandemic have not been directly explored, especially in the Indonesia population. The long-term stability of heuristic cue could be useful intervention in attitude change as well as important contribution to Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion since the study of media credibility using user comments as its core study represents media brand credibility [18] (Winter, 2013).

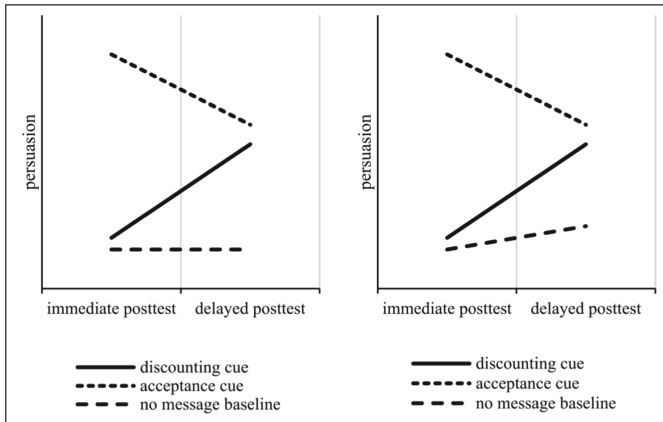
## 2 Research Objective

This research intended to assess the strength of sleeper effect using exemplification effects over time that positively affect risk perception and behavioural intention. We investigated this effect through three media as independent variables: text, photograph and text, and photograph. Each variable is measured and discussed here. We also determined whether the three media represented absolute or relative sleeper effect. From here, the results could give insight on how to create appropriate communication response in a risky situation such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia.

## 3 Literature Review

### Sleeper Effect in Exemplification

Exemplification theory uses evolutionary reasoning to generate realistic assumptions about the information most likely to influence a receiver's judgements [19]. The cognitive mechanisms that underlie the generalization strategy are mostly heuristic in design.



**Fig. 1.** Absolute sleeper effect as noted in “The sleeper effect in persuasion: A meta-analytic review” (Kumkale and Albarracín [23] describing higher persuasion).

According to Zillmann [20], people employ a representative heuristic when assessing groups based on particular single persons they have met before, and the effect tends to get stronger as the number of exemplars provided increases. Moreover, immediately after reading a fictitious text, readers are typically able to properly assign information to the story source, while the precision of such attributions decreases after a delay, for example, one week [21].

### Degree of Sleeper Effect

Sleeper effect in its early time had been doubted as discipline rooted in psychology, since it did not differ between its relative and absolute effect [22]. Most investigations have indicated relative sleeper effect, when the discounting-cue subject is contrasted with a group who heard a message with an acceptance cue [23]. A relative sleeper effect describes a decline in persuasion over time in the acceptance-cue group (or message-only group, if no acceptance cue was operationalized), while persuasion in the discounting-cue group (1) remains static, (2) reduces less than in acceptance-cue group, or (3) rises as much as in the no-message group ([23] see Fig. 2). Absolute and relative sleeper effect persuasion effects converge in the discounting-cue and acceptance-cue groups over time.

Fictional stories may evoke strong and long-lasting persuasive effects independently. The power of fiction to convince will undoubtedly increase with time, culminating in a total sleeper effect [24]. However, according to exemplification theory [6], clear, distinctive, visually stunning, and emotionally stimulating pictures may be more successful in convincing general public since they are more readily retained in mind and recalled for future references. This account leads to hypothesis (H1) *the sleeper effect induced by exemplification effect from real cases on one phenomenon improving over time and likely to create absolute sleeper effect* (Fig. 1).

### Photograph and Text as Medium of Exemplification

Images index and reflect reality [25] and borne tangible sensory while visually appealing. Images, more than words, emotionally connect with readers, which may make them

more engaging [26]. When it comes to processing visual inputs (non-mediated) as well as visual media, the same neural exercises apply [27]. Text, on the other hand, provides a clear framework for determining who did what to whom and why [1]. Since tangible tales and pictures enable journalists to simplify complicated and illustrate abstract topics, capture the audience's attention to help public understand and retain the content, the predominance of exemplars in the media is expected [17]. Visual communications offer many benefits compared to text information due to the inherent distinctions between both modalities of processing as numerous theoretical models and empirical findings in communication, neurology, and cognitive psychology demonstrate that pictorial visual information is processed more rapidly than written information [28]. Inclusion of one's image enhance the imagery meaning and prime the issue into mind. Thus, **(H2)** *the combined text and pictorial exemplar will prevail and sustain risk perception and behavioural intention, thus creating a sleeper effect after some time.*

### **Persuasion Likelihood in Risk Perception and Behavioural Intention**

Several people when faced with the same decision-making situation will make different decisions depending on each person's perception and understanding of the risks and impacts. Avoiding risk, facing risk, tolerance for risk and a neutral position towards risk are forms of response to perception-driven uncertainty [29]. According to Slovic [30], there are 7 factors in the perception of risk, namely: (1) Voluntariness, degree of how much the assessment of a risky activity is carried out voluntarily, (2) Dread, degree of how much fear in doing a risky activity, (3) Control, degree of how much a person who carries out a risky activity has control over the impact of the activity, (4) Knowledge, degree of the level of knowledge a person has on the risk of carrying out the risky activity, (5) Catastrophic Potential, degree of the level of disaster that can occur as a result of carrying out an activity risky, (6) Novelty, the level of assessment of a risky activity that is carried out as a new or not, (7) Equity, the level of risk due to carrying out a risky activity whose impact is felt by other people outside the perpetrator.

In Wilson's research [31] which investigated the relationship of persuasive messages to behaviour change, the attitude-forming factors in the Elaboration Likelihood Model were described as follows: (1) Source credibility, the extent to which information sources show competence and credibility [32] are knowledgeable and the validity of the information [33], expert and trustworthy [34], (2) The quality of the message argument, the quality of the level of trust [35], whether a message is easy to remember [36], understandable and clear delivery [37], (3) Ability to process messages, availability of cognitive resources and relevant knowledge needed to analyse stimuli. (4) Involvement/personal relevance, the extent to which information has intrinsic value or personal meaning for someone. In this study, personal involvement/relevance refers to subjective meaning based on experiences related to phenomena, which are given by respondents after reading information in the form of events related to COVID-19 in photos and text on the online news portal Kompas.com.

According to Devine and Hirt [38], the weakness of ELM is that it cannot explain the relationship between attitude change and behaviour change. In this study, researchers will look at the effect of exemplars on behavioural intentions (which occur before behaviour). This is where the role of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen is needed to fill the gap where external variables such as subjective norms, and internal such as attitudes and

control over behaviour are factors that guide the process from consideration, elaboration, intention to behave until behaviour occurs [39]. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a theory developed by Ajzen which is a refinement of the Reason Action Theory proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen [40]. The main focus of this theory is the individual's intention to perform certain behaviours. Behavioural intentions are considered to show motivational factors that influence behaviour. Attitude in the Elaboration Likelihood Model is one of the components forming the intention to behave. Intention (intention to behave) is a decision to perform and continue to perform certain behaviours. If there is a positive attitude, support from people around and the perception of ease because there are no barriers to behavior, the person's intention to behave will be higher [41].

## 4 Research Method

To address the hypotheses, a set of measurement to measure text, photograph, and text and photograph as independent variables were created and tested from exemplification theory key tenants. Sampled was taken on January 2019 in two weeks' time utilizing direct stimuli exposure of each group sample then taking their responses through questionnaire. 7 factors of Slovic [42] risk perception was operationalized to measure risk perception variable. Key elements of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior [43] and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model [31] were also developed to measure and address potential intermediate details towards behavioral intention variable ( $r_{II} = 0.91$  reliability, validity Cronbach Alpha score for exemplars was 0.89, risk perception score was 0.84, and behavioral intention score was 0.86). Randomized 90 participants of two subdistricts in Mampang Prapatan, South Jakarta completed two post-tests in true experiment design: one immediately after the stimuli and following 14 days later. Participants were divided into three experimental groups, each exposed to text exemplar, photograph exemplar, and text & photograph exemplar. Manipulated news served as text stimuli highlighted a personal testimonial from family whose member passed away after contracting COVID-19 and a photograph of coffin monument in Kemang Raya street as pictorial exemplar. The data was analyzed using regression analysis value  $\beta_1$  comparison to gauge the sleeper effect caused by the exemplars' exposure.

## 5 Research Results

From the raw data, first demographic categories were mapped (but not shown here for the sake of brevity). 90 participants were consisting of evenly man and woman counting 30 individuals on each experiment group and each member of groups were exposed to same questionnaire. On the second stage, regression analysis was conducted and resulted as follows Table 1.

From the Table 1, it is shown that first post-test has tested and confirmed the exemplification effect as on three types of exemplars: text  $\beta_1 = 0.691$ , picture  $\beta_1 = 0.709$ , and text & picture  $\beta_1 = 0.971$  indicating the high impact of exemplar to risk perception as dependent variable, while exemplar's impact on behavior intention to comply with health protocol was slightly lower: text  $\beta_1 = 0.659$ , picture  $\beta_1 = 0.542$ , and text & picture  $\beta_1 = 0.752$ . The sleeper effect detected from both variables' regression on the

**Table 1.** Value comparison indicating sleeper effect

First Post-Test	$\beta 1$	p-value (F)	p-value (t)	R2
Exemplar text	0.691	0.000	0.000	0.552
Exemplar visual (photographic)	0.709	0.000	0.000	0.505
Exemplar text & visual	0.971	0.000	0.000	0.714
Dependent var: risk perception of contracting COVID-19				
Exemplar text	0.659	0.000	0.000	0.658
Exemplar visual (photographic)	0.542	0.000	0.000	0.527
Exemplar text & visual	0.752	0.000	0.000	0.744
Dependent var: behaviour intention to health protocol compliance				
Second Post-Test	$\beta 1$	p-value (F)	p-value (t)	R2
Text Exemplar	0.595	0.001	0.001	0.324
Pictorial Exemplar	0.720	0.000	0.000	0.476
Text & Pictorial Exemplar	0.853	0.000	0.000	0.617
Dependent var: risk perception of contracting COVID-19				
Text Exemplar	0.364	0.052	0.052	0.129
Pictorial Exemplar	0.631	0.000	0.000	0.414
Text & Pictorial Exemplar	1.034	0.000	0.000	0.729
Dependent var: behaviour intention to health protocol compliance				
<b>Sleeper effect</b>				
$\uparrow$ improving effect		$\downarrow$ decay effect		$\alpha = 0.05$

second post-test. The decay sleeper effect shown at text exemplar ( $\beta 1 = 0.595$ ) and text and pictorial exemplar ( $\beta 1 = 0.853$ ) in risk perception variable, and text exemplar towards behavior intention variable ( $\beta 1 = 0.364$ ). On the other hand, pictorial shown stronger effect on risk perception ( $\beta 1 = 0.720$ ) and pictorial ( $\beta 1 = 0.631$ ) and text and pictorial exemplars towards behavior intention ( $\beta 1 = 1.034$ ) (Table 1).

## 6 Discussion

The result above has indeed proven that the sleeper effect induced by exemplification effect from real cases on one phenomenon improving over time and likely to create

absolute sleeper effect (H1). The absolute sleeper effect was shown by text and pictorial exemplar towards behaviour intention. The presence of a picture has shown to affect views and the actual content of a picture combines with participants' prior knowledge helped shaping information processing and judgments. The underlying mechanism of sleeper effect is information processing on rule of thumb called heuristics [44]. In the event an individual be exposed and/or recalled exemplar, quantification heuristic made allocation on mind of the exemplar's occurrences. Exemplar, exact or similar stored in our brain and grouped by their characteristics [6, 20, 45]. Later on, the representative heuristic will make generalization on these similarly stored exemplars to make prediction. For example, the news highlighted the coffin monument as the symbol of COVID's death and news regarding the lack of coffin's stock in Jakarta will make someone predict if inaccurately that the massive COVID's death in Jakarta had occurred. On the last stage of exemplification mechanism, availability heuristic will make these recall available to formulate further judgement. Exemplar that has greater impact on our overall knowledge is obtained through non-conscious retrieval and much simpler way [20, 44]. In general, when the source of the information is untrustworthy in one direction, a discounting cue is generated, resulting in an absolute sleeper effect [23]. The absolute sleeper effect has also been caused by the separation of message content from memory representation [24], and should discounting cue fade faster than message content [8].

It is then interesting why the text and pictorial exemplar towards risk perception was slightly decayed although it proven in first post-test to elicit exemplification effect through emotionally laden picture and personal testimony. How individual perceived their own ability to deal with health and safety hazards and carry out specific action towards certain goals (self-efficacy) are a result of beliefs about how often these risks occur e.g., susceptibility [6]. It is highly likely that participants had regarded their self-efficacy as somewhat able to manage the risk from this disease, such as comply with the health protocol and/or at the time of measurement have not yet exposed to its danger.

However, the combined text and pictorial exemplar will prevail and sustain risk perception and behavioural intention, thus creating a sleeper effect after some time (H2) is partly answered and proven. From the Table 1, the sleeper effect that grew stronger over time is in pictorial exemplar towards risk perception and behaviour intention and text and pictorial exemplar towards behaviour intention. On emotionally arousing exemplar, exemplification effect is seen to have greater influence than on less or non-emotionally arousing exemplar. Picture is more powerful than textual or verbal exemplar. This effect will increase over time [20]. This is also one of six key predictions proposed by Zillman. Researchers in communication had tested this emotional arousal act a go-between exposure to exemplar and the outcomes such as behaviour intention, risk perception, message recall, behaviour [46].

## 7 Conclusion

During an individual exposed to written message, the brain will encode the message into two information: credibility of the source and the message itself [47]. The encoding process will be elaborated and stored for later recall. Should the individual utilize his self to reference this message, the elaboration on encoding process becoming more effective thus generate the valence of availability which majorly determines interpretation of

sleeper effect. When an individual exposed by message that similar or exactly has been stored in his memory (cognitively available), the message will be easily added up. This availability depends on cognitive elaboration and recency of message. Cognitive elaboration itself represents type of linked memory association that being activated when encoding the message [48].

In summary from consistent empirical evidence for the theory and suggested processes, exemplification theory offers a viable method for message effects, media effects, and communication effects. The results indicated that sleeper effect in exemplification did exist in risky situation and grew stronger after fourteen days to participants who exposed to pictorial exemplars towards their risk perception and participants who exposed to pictorial, and text and pictorial exemplars towards their behavior intention. Risk perception and behavioral intention were stronger in impact to individuals who were given text and pictorial exemplar, and the effect though partial (slightly decay on risk perception) is stronger over time. As reference of sleeper effect in exemplification theory is currently growing it is imperative to examine sleeper effect by testing the key prediction proposed by Zillmann which have been limitation in this research for future study.

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