

The effectiveness of using visual elements to convey messages about awareness regarding mental health in children aged 9 – 14 years in Indonesia

(case study: children aged 8 - 14 years in Semarang)

Bayu Widianoro¹, Chrysanía²,

1. Visual Communication Design, Faculty of Architecture & Design, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Pawiyatan Luhur IV no 1 Bendan Dhuwur Semarang, 50234, Indonesia
2. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8495-1887>
3. Visual Communication Design, Soegijapranata Catholic University, Pawiyatan Luhur IV / 1 Bendan Dhuwur, Semarang, 50234, Indonesia

E-mail: widianoro@unika.ac.id,
Cryshaniacaca00@gmail.com

Abstract

The delivery of messages through media can sometimes be ineffective due to inconsistencies in the use of visual elements in the planned design.** This issue is also prevalent in information design used to convey messages about mental health in Indonesia. The understanding of mental health among the 8-14 age group is often inadequate, resulting in a significant number of individuals within the target audience being unaware of their mental health issues.

This study employs a quantitative method. Initial data collection was conducted through questionnaires, followed by randomly interviewing several subjects to gain a deeper understanding of the target audience's habits in accessing information. Subsequently, an analysis of the visual elements used was conducted, linking them to the habits and behaviors of the intended audience.

The results of this study indicate that effective message delivery must consider the visual design elements used, including visual objects such as items or text, the proportion of verbal and visual components in the design, and whether the target audience can directly access the media where the design is applied.

Keywords: *visual elements, information design, visual communication, mental health.*

PENDAHULUAN

In the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, the term "mental health" and the need for "healing" have become very common among Generation X and Y. This is evidenced by a statement from the WHO, which states that 1 in 8 people, or 970 million people worldwide, experience mental disorders of varying degrees (KKI, 2022). Anxiety disorders have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Among this number, data shows that 12-13% are children and adolescents (Kessler, in Prihatiningsih, 2019). These anxiety and mental disorders usually occur because an individual is unable to adapt to their surroundings, and this inability to adapt often leads to excessive depression or pressure (Putri, 2015: 25)

Another data source indicates that 15.5 million adolescents suffer from mental disorders, including anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, behavioral disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and hyperactivity (ADHD) at various levels (Kartika, 2022). This is quite concerning, as it affects pre-teens and teenagers from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Individuals with good mental health can also experience anxiety disorders due to poorly managed psychological changes under certain conditions (Kusumaningsih, 2023).

There have been numerous efforts by both the government and private sectors concerned with the mental health of the nation's future generations. These efforts include the provision of mental hospitals in each provincial capital and hospitals with facilities for mental health consultations (Kusumaningsih, 2023: 11).

The efforts that need to be made by the (local) government to provide mental health services are also stipulated in Law No. 18 of 2014 concerning mental health. Given the existing regulations, many measures should already be in place to inform the public about efforts to maintain mental health. However, in Indonesia, many

people (especially children and teenagers) still suffer from mental disorders, leading to many activities being halted because the current generation of children and teenagers does not realize they are experiencing mental health problems. This indicates that the various information disseminated by the government has not been effectively communicated or targeted.

The problem that then arises is why the message was not delivered properly. There are several things that might be a problem, namely using design elements that are not appropriate to the intended target or providing information using inappropriate media.

METODE

This study will use a quantitative research method to assess how much information about "maintaining mental health" is disseminated, viewed, read, and understood by the target community. The target community consists of young people, from children to pre-teens, aged 7 to 14 years, living in the city of Semarang

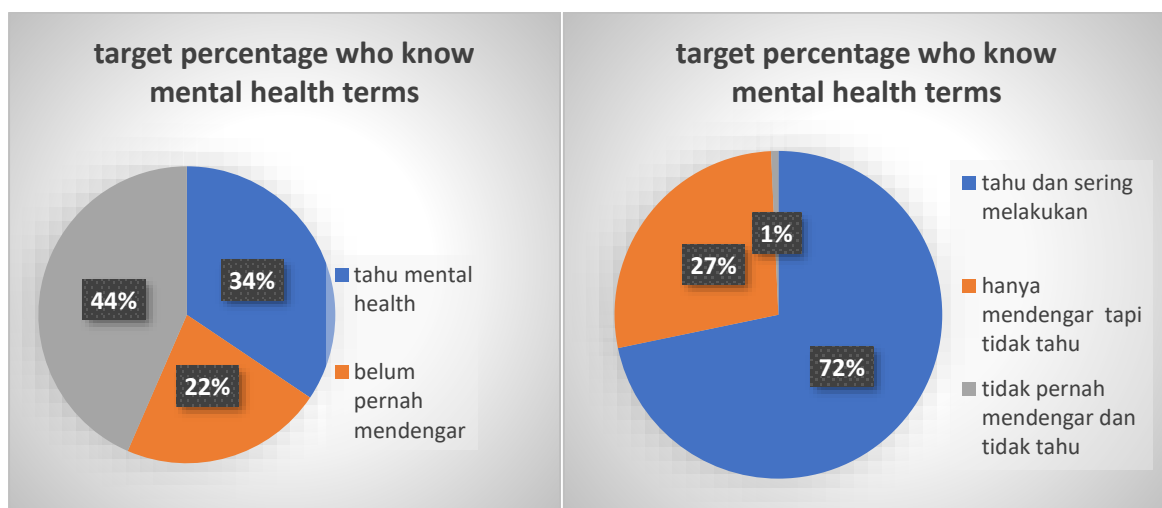
Data collection is conducted through questionnaires distributed online via the students' parents. This approach is necessary because a mediator is required to reach the target audience. Additionally, field observations are made to understand how the targets interact with informational posters in their daily activities.

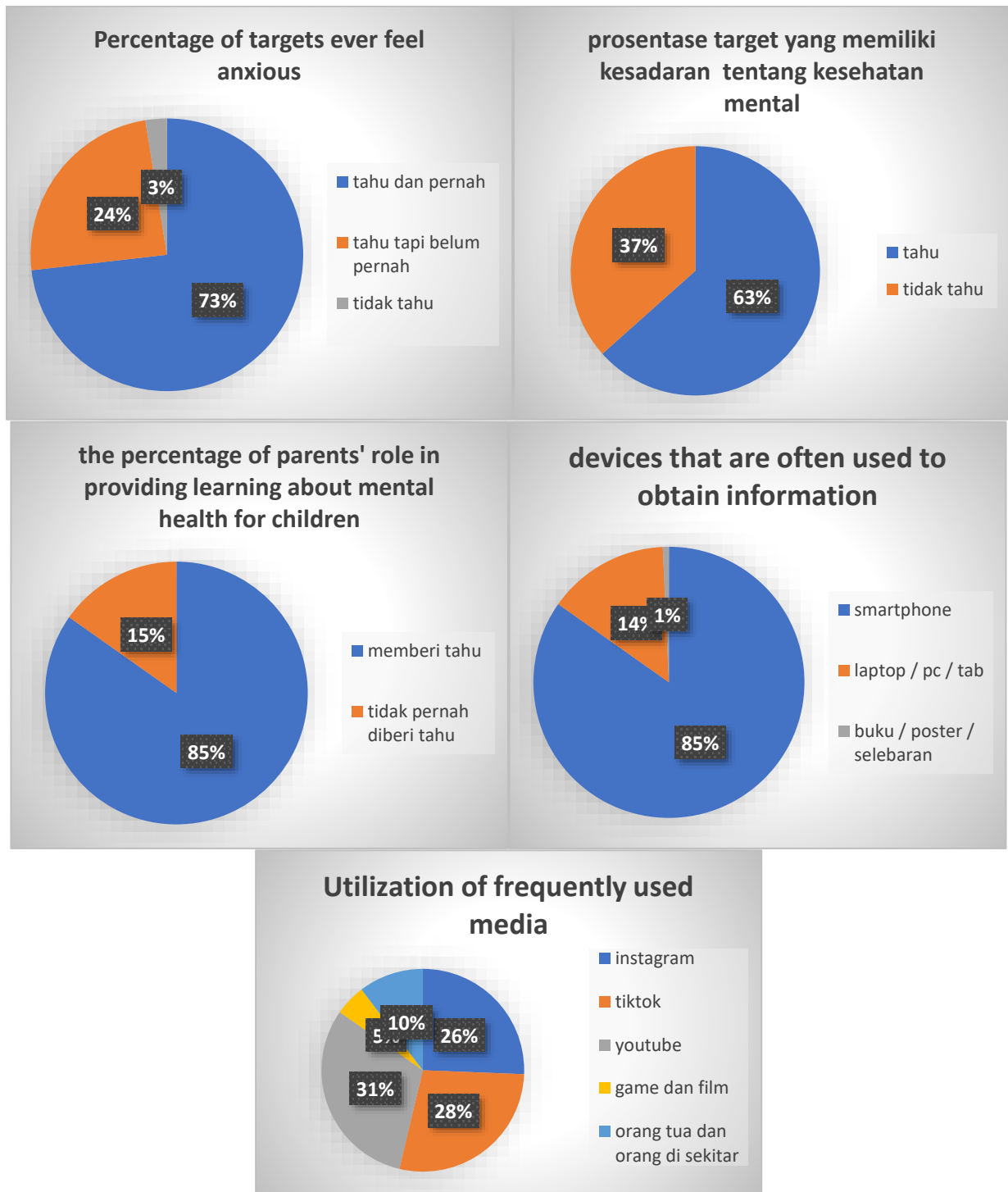
For data collection aimed at formulating a hypothesis, we will examine what drives the target audience to notice, memorize, or comprehend the messages conveyed to them.

The analysis in this study compares the number of messages that can be captured and understood by the target audience to determine which type of message attracts them more. Specifically, we will evaluate whether static images that elicit a passive response (just viewing/reading) are more effective, or if interactive media, even in the form of simple visuals or game materials, engages them better. We will assess which is more effective for them: reading and listening, or seeing, interpreting, and doing something.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

From the data collection conducted, we obtained responses from 276 respondents spread across several districts in the city of Semarang. The results show that pre-teens aged 9 to 14 years do not frequently read information related to mental health. The data obtained are as follows:





To observe the results obtained, it is necessary to first study the habits within the target group. The target group comprises individuals aged between 9 and 14 years. This age group is chosen because many at this age do not realize that their mental health condition is not well. They are a segment of society that is searching for their identity and is highly influenced by their peers and environment. According to psychosocial theory, children within the target age range will always try to develop self-confidence to demonstrate their competence in their developmental environment. Therefore, the impact of their environment plays a significant role in their development. If they are unable to meet the demands of their surroundings, they will feel inferior unless they are promptly provided with explanations about their inability to respond and adapt to their environment (Erikson, 1950: 247-274).

This growth period is also a stage where individuals seek validation and acceptance from their peer groups, which in the formation of identity requires coherent experiences and experimentation (Steinberg, 2014: 169-202).

The target's willingness to seek information from their surroundings, such as friends, gadgets, and social media, rather than from within their family, begins to be evident in diagrams 5, 6, and 7. The role of parents is diminishing. This is something that needs attention in relation to conveying information to the target audience.

Children aged 9 to 14 years prefer messages delivered through visuals that relate to their lives. They find it easier to receive messages in visual form compared to verbal communication, whether written or spoken (Levin, 1981: 58-60). Another aspect that supports this theory is that learning that combines text with images (visuals) is more effective than information conveyed only through text, especially when the information is intended for children (Meyer, 2001: 79-81).

Processing information simultaneously using visual and verbal media reduces the cognitive load on a child and accelerates understanding of the message received because, at this age, children between 9 and 14 are in the concrete operational stage of development (Sweller J, 1994: 32-34).

Considering the above theory and the data obtained, there is a close correlation between the two, suggesting that messages for children aged 9 to 14 should be delivered through media that includes more than just text (verbal). It is more effective if the message is conveyed through visual media. Visual media should be related to experiences familiar to the target audience, rather than just presenting visual messages alone.

To examine the correlation between message delivery and experiences, here are some images provided by several parties that contain mental health messages.



Gambar 1. Information about mental health with text

(Source: <https://www.ui.ac.id/ui-rekomendasikan-empat-kebijakan-kesehatan-mental-selama-dan-pascapandemi-covid-19/>)



Gambar 4. Information about mental health
(Source: <https://data.purwakartakab.go.id/infografis/m6uNaL>)

From the four images used as examples, all convey messages using a combination of images and text, with different proportions in each image.

Image 1 primarily uses text with visuals only as decorative ornaments.

Image 2 uses visuals to explain the accompanying text.

Image 3, like image 2, uses visuals to explain the text.

The difference between image 2 and image 3 is the color elements in the background of the objects.

Image 4 has fewer visuals in terms of quantity, but the proportion of visuals and text is balanced.

When these four images were presented to the target audience (respondents), the image that was most quickly understood was image number 3, followed by image number 4, then image number 2, and lastly image number 1. When the research was conducted directly by asking questions to the target audience in person, the responses indicated that the interest was due to the use of contrasting colors between the background and the message content. Additionally, it was found that the visuals used in image number 3 were closer to the target audience's experiences. The target audience found it easier to interpret and understand the content of that image. It should be noted that these images were placed on social media websites, which the target audience rarely visited. The images were only noticed by the target audience when shown directly and asked to quickly grasp the message through a smartphone.

"The use of smartphones as a medium to convey visual messages is also because smartphones are one of the tools often used by the target audience in obtaining information. Information will be more easily accepted if it is delivered using a medium that can make the target (in this case, targets aged 9 – 14 years) interact well with objects, products, or colors present in the media that will be used to convey the message (Gelman, 2014: 32-40).

An individual (of various ages) will more easily grasp a message/information if it is conveyed through a communication approach known as integrated experience, an experience that is contextual with their everyday culture and relevant to their daily life. (Wright, 2006: 142-155). It is stated there that if a child is accustomed to using computers in their daily life, then the message will be effective if conveyed through computer media. In this research, it was found that the media for conveying messages has been delivered through media commonly used by the target audience; however, its delivery still cannot be considered effective. This ineffectiveness may occur because the platform used to convey messages is not a platform frequently used in the target's daily routine."

Several factors may hinder the target audience from understanding the message:

1. The target audience is still under parental supervision and lacks broad knowledge, making the influence of parents as motivators for seeking information crucial. (According to Diagram 5, it was found that parents do not provide sufficient information about mental health to their children, as they believe the children are too young to understand such matters).
2. The media used to convey information is still global in nature and does not specifically target the 9-14 year age group. This includes considerations related to the dimensions of images, letters, and the language used.
3. The images displayed in posters (featured on websites or social media) are not closely related to the needs, culture, and habits of the target audience. The images tend to be informative but fail to present a narrative that can be understood by the target audience.

SIMPULAN

From the discussion, it was concluded that the effectiveness of message delivery is influenced by the target audience's understanding of the visual media used, including design elements (such as shapes, colors, arrangements, and object dimensions), the design style, media placement, and the role of parents in encouraging children to view and comprehend the message, particularly regarding mental health.

When delivering a message, it is essential to consider the behavior, culture, and daily activities of the target audience. The message will not be conveyed if the recipients do not relate to it. Additionally, the target audience will never be able to receive the information if it is delivered through unfamiliar media channels.

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