

# Visual Narratives in Health Communication: Evaluating Comics as Tools for Health Literacy by the Indonesian Ministry of Health

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## ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the efficacy of comics as a strategic communication tool for health promotion, utilizing a qualitative analysis of literature and examples from the “Sehat Negeriku” website managed by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. The multifaceted nature of comics, incorporating visual storytelling and character-driven narratives, offers a unique method for conveying complex health messages in an accessible and engaging manner. This research identifies several key advantages of comics in health communication, including increased appeal and interest among diverse demographics, enhanced memory retention through visual cues, emotional engagement that deepens message impact, stimulated creativity and imagination, and the ability to reach a broad audience. Data collection involved a thorough review of existing literature and content analysis of health communication comics, focusing on their structure, content, and reception. The findings highlight how comics, by blending entertainment with educational content, can effectively reduce resistance to health messages, facilitate behavioral change, and contribute to public health knowledge. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of considering cultural relevance and audience-specific characteristics in comic design to maximize their educational impact. This paper contributes to the understanding of visual communication in public health and supports the integration of comics into broader health promotion strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Health communication strategies utilizing comics represent a compelling method for disseminating health information to the public in a format that is both engaging and accessible. Health communication transpires through the interaction between a sender and a recipient, utilizing various suitable media to relay messages pertaining to health concerns. Communication is fundamentally an art, entailing the creation and transmission of ideas by individuals (Sugiyo, 2018). The primary objectives of health communication include disseminating information, shaping public attitudes and behaviors, and enhancing awareness and comprehension of health issues (Sonke et al., 2021). Communication serves as a vital process of social interaction, essential for conveying messages symbolically so that they may be received by others (Khotimah, 2019, Sukma et al., 2022). Effective health communication must be universally acceptable to patients, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds, thus bridging any perceptual gaps (Salim et al., 2022). Accordingly, health communication studies the application of communication strategies to inform and influence both individual and community health decisions (Paramasari & Nugroho, 2021). By integrating accurate health information with engaging visual elements, comic-based health communication strategies can effectively broadcast health messages in a manner that is both comprehensible and appealing to a broad audience (Kearns & Kearns, 2020). Additionally, the World Health



Organization (2023) outlines several principles of effective communication that are pertinent to the implementation of such strategies.

Effective communication as delineated by the World Health Organization (WHO) extends its utility across a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including individuals, communities, policymakers, international organizations, and health workers. This approach is visually encapsulated in the WHO's infographic on effective communication. Infographics serve as a potent tool in communication strategies, transforming complex data, concepts, and information into visual formats that accelerate understanding and enhance clarity for the target audience (Nababan & Ardhianto, 2022). Fundamental communication principles, as recommended by WHO, emphasize that communication should be accessible, actionable, trustworthy, relevant, timely, and comprehensible. The success of communication efforts also hinges on the judicious selection of media, ensuring that the chosen medium effectively reaches and resonates with decision-makers. This necessitates a thorough analysis of the target audience and their preferred media channels, which is a critical planning component in the communication process (Sugiyono, 2018).

Health communication is a critical element of health promotion, as emphasized by Green, L.W., and Kreuter (2005), who describe health promotion as an extensive enterprise involving educational, policy, regulatory, and organizational measures designed to promote the health of individuals, groups, or communities. Furthermore, health promotion is driven by the motivation to enhance well-being and realize the full potential of human health (Notoadmodjo, 2012). Within this framework, health communication focuses on the strategic dissemination and evaluation of health-related information to the public, a concept supported by People (2010) and further detailed by Sugiyono (2018). Therefore, the selection of appropriate media channels for conveying vital information to the public is of utmost importance. These channels must provide easy access and support extensive distribution to all segments of society, ensuring that the health messages are effectively communicated and impactful.

The Indonesian Ministry of Health has adopted comics as a method of health communication, effectively using this medium to impart health-related information to a diverse audience. Comics, employing both verbal and non-verbal language, aim to influence the reader's understanding and behavior regarding health issues (Sugiyono, 2018). Beyond merely conveying information, comics serve as educational tools. Extensive research highlights the pedagogical benefits of using comics in learning environments (Pramesti et al., 2020). The term "comic" originates from the English word, which connotes humor and entertainment. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), comics are primarily defined as illustrated stories published in magazines, newspapers, or books that are generally light-hearted and easy to comprehend (Salam et al., 2018). Comics are multifunctional, offering entertainment and educational value. They not only provide leisure reading but also can influence readers through vividly conveyed messages. Comic artists, as message producers, embed various themes and critiques within their work, effectively communicating with their audience (Ramadhani & Putra, 2017).

Will Eisner, a prominent figure in the field of comics, characterizes their function as not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for instruction and other purposes (Mataram, 2017). The method of delivering comics through visual storytelling is particularly effective for communicating messages. Visual storytelling combines visuals, elements observable by the eye, with the art of storytelling. The potency of visual images lies in their ability to communicate narratives without the need for text, prompting viewers to interpret the depicted scenes (Sabri & Adiprabowo, 2022). In the context of health communication, visual storytelling facilitates the transmission of health-related messages to patients. This method becomes even more effective when supplemented with appropriate narration and dialogue, transforming the content into a comprehensible comic format.

Visual storytelling is a narrative technique that relies primarily on imagery to tell stories. Within the context of comics, this approach involves using illustrations and panels to unfold the narrative and express character emotions, distinctively different from verbal narration, which depends entirely on text to convey the story (Medina, 2022). According to Cahyadi et al. (2023), visual storytelling employs visual components such as images, video clips, animations, and visual compositions to narrate stories or communicate messages. This method is particularly effective in reaching audiences as it reduces the reliance on extensive verbal narration or textual explanations. By integrating various visual elements, visual storytelling creates engaging and compelling narratives that capture and hold the audience's attention.

Using a blend of visual storytelling and narration, comics emerge as a potent medium for conveying messages, especially those related to health. The strength of visual imagery in comics facilitates the transmission of information with minimal reliance on text, simplifying the process of communicating health messages to patients. The synergy of visuals and storytelling enhances the effectiveness of this communication method. As noted by Lukitowati et al. (2023), this combination allows for clear and impactful delivery of health-related information, making comics an invaluable tool in reaching a broad audience effectively.

Several elements in comics allow them to convey messages effectively, including: (1) Visualization: Comics use images and illustrations to tell stories. Through this visualization, the message can be conveyed in a way that is more interesting and easy to understand by the reader. The images used in comics can reinforce the message to be conveyed. (2) Narration and dialogue: A comic uses narration and dialogue between characters to develop the story. Moral messages

can be conveyed through dialogue between characters or narratives accompanying the characters' actions in the comic. (3) Emotion and identification: By presenting identifiable characters, Comics can influence readers' emotions. Readers can feel empathy, joy, sadness, or tension through visual experiences in comics. Moral messages can be more pronounced and relatable to readers through these emotions. (4) Repetition and conclusion: Comics often use the repetition of a particular motif or theme that reinforces the message to be conveyed. By repeating certain messages consistently, comics can help readers understand and remember those messages. In addition, a clear conclusion felt at the end of the comic story can also be a means to strengthen the moral message to be conveyed. By using the above elements, comics can be an effective medium to convey moral messages to readers. Through a combination of images, narrative, dialogue, emotion, and repetition, comics can deliver an enjoyable reading experience while providing valuable learning and messaging.

## METHOD

The research method employed in this study is problem-based and utilizes a literature literacy analysis. The initial phase of this approach involves identifying relevant literature sources, which include academic databases, scientific journals, and other scholarly publications. The subsequent selection of literature is guided by considerations of quality, relevance, and novelty of information. Literature, in this context, refers to various forms of written works—ranging from books to digital articles—that serve as resources for information acquisition or as references in educational and other academic activities (Kurniati & Jailani, 2023). Data collection for this study was conducted using screenshot techniques, which involve capturing images and screen displays from electronic devices and smartphones. These screenshots are typically used to present or share information (Juniartha et al., 2021). This research specifically aims to elucidate the use of comics as a medium for communicating health messages by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. The analysis centers on concepts and theories pertinent to the subject matter, with a focus on articles from the “Sehat Negeriku” website—a platform managed by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. One such article, titled “Healthy Comics,” illustrates how the ministry utilizes comics as a tool to disseminate health-related information effectively.

Additionally, this study examines the role of visual storytelling in health information comics featured on the “Sehat Negeriku” website. These comics represent a strategic communication tool used by the Ministry of Health to engage a wide audience, providing health education that is not only more accessible but also entertaining and appealing to diverse demographic groups.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research identified multiple benefits of using comics as a medium for health communication, drawing on examples from the Indonesian Ministry of Health. The analysis revealed five key benefits:

1. **Increased Appeal and Interest:** Comics have proven to be a compelling medium for increasing appeal and interest in health communication, capitalizing on the integration of familiar imagery with textual narratives to make information both accessible and engaging (Kaluku et al., 2023). The strategic use of visuals paired with concise, impactful text enhances comprehension and enjoyment, particularly among diverse audiences including children and teenagers, who may find traditional educational materials less engaging (Hidayat et al., 2023; Rosidah et al., 2022). The design of comics, tailored to reflect the characteristics and interests of specific groups, such as teenagers, further maximizes their appeal and effectiveness. This customization allows comics to resonate more deeply with readers, potentially leading to a greater understanding and retention of health information (Attwood & Gerber, 2020). The increasing utilization of comics in health education underscores their growing significance and effectiveness in engaging audiences, facilitating an enhanced desire to learn and comprehend health-related topics (Araya et al., 2021). Research suggests that the unique narrative style of comics not only makes the reading experience more enjoyable but also serves as a powerful tool in health promotion. By blending entertainment with education, comics offer a dynamic approach to disseminating health information that can captivate and inform a broad audience.
2. **Enhanced Memory Retention:** Visualization in comics plays a crucial role in effectively communicating messages through a compelling blend of images and text. This method attracts readers by merging potent visuals with narrative elements that enhance the understanding and retention of key messages (Chattopadhyay, 2019). The use of comedian characters, as explored by Chiodini (2019), exemplifies how visuals can facilitate the absorption of significant information, such as safety messages related to transportation, making it more relatable and memorable for readers. Furthermore, the strategic integration of theory and data within comic narratives can result in culturally appropriate health messages that not only educate but also resonate with diverse audiences (Celentano et al., 2021). This approach underscores the importance of images as primary tools in strengthening the impact of the communicated message. Research by Bajraghosa (2019) delves into how comics can evoke local values and express these through visual and rhetorical means, thereby enhancing the narrative experience. This type of representation is crucial for ensuring that the messages conveyed are not only understood but also appreciated within the cultural contexts of the audience.

3. **Emotional Engagement:** Comics, through their unique combination of pictures and text, effectively enhance memory retention, particularly when conveying health messages. The integration of comic images and dialogue simplifies complex information, making it more memorable compared to traditional text-only approaches (Wisudawati et al., 2022). Comics not only facilitate a deeper understanding of specific subjects through vivid imagery but also offer a medium-specific approach that improves memory by allowing readers to visualize and internalize content (Kraenzle, 2020). The visualization techniques employed in comics expose our brains to information in a format that is easier to recall. By forming strong mental pictures of narrative events, comics help readers anchor information more effectively. Additionally, the emotional resonance of characters within comics plays a significant role in enhancing memory. As demonstrated in studies of visual narratives in other media, such as documentaries, the relationship between the representation of life experiences and memory highlights how effectively visual elements can anchor recollections (Gorrara, 2018). The impact of emotional connections is also evident in the realm of game design, as seen with the Manga Matrix's approach to creating visually and emotionally engaging characters for Indonesian ghost games like *Dreadeye VR* (Putra, 2022). Such characters act as emotional touchpoints that significantly enhance the memorability of the narrative. In the context of the "Sehatnegeri" comic, the research focuses on how the simplified portrayal of characters can streamline the conveyance of health messages. By reducing the complexity of character designs, the comic artist directs the reader's attention more toward the underlying health messages rather than the characters themselves. This approach ensures that the educational content remains the focal point, enhancing the comic's effectiveness as a health communication tool. The strategic use of visual and emotional elements in comics not only makes them an engaging medium but also a powerful tool in public health education, leveraging both memory and emotional connectivity to maximize the impact of conveyed messages.
4. **Stimulated Creativity and Imagination:** Comics are a unique medium that harnesses creative elements to significantly stimulate imagination and creativity among readers. As Shoimah (2023) points out, the very essence of comic stories is to enhance the ability to develop creativity, providing a visual narrative style that prompts readers to think inventively and explore imaginative health solutions relevant to the narrative. This aspect of comics has proven particularly valuable in communication strategies during the pandemic, where innovative approaches to disseminating information and engaging the public have been crucial (Nuriza et al., 2022). Comics engage readers actively by requiring them to fill in details that are not explicitly shown in the images, such as the characters' voices, movements, facial expressions, and interactions. This engagement is not merely passive consumption but an interactive process that fosters creativity and helps readers construct rich, imaginative worlds (Maryani, 2020). This capability of comics to animate the reader's imagination makes them an effective tool for visualizing abstract concepts, honing aesthetic tastes, and interpreting complex ideas. Moreover, the nature of comics encourages creative thinking in the creation of personal characters and storylines. Strong, well-developed characters and compelling plots in comics can inspire readers to craft unique characters and backdrops and to conceive their creative narratives. This inspiration is particularly profound as comics combine images and text in a way that encourages readers to envision themselves within the scenarios depicted, further enhanced by the use of everyday language that makes these scenes feel more relatable and natural. The objective, especially highlighted in this research, is to leverage these imaginative engagements to prompt a positive response to current events.
5. **Broader Audience Reach:** Comics can appeal to a wider audience comprising of people of different ages and backgrounds. As a visual medium, comics needs to connect with the reader's existing knowledge and experiences (Kusuma et al., 2022). Comics can be used to spread important health information to a wider audience, including children, teenagers, and adults. This allows for greater public participation in the dissemination of health-related messages. Comics have an easily accessible format, with a combination of images and text that makes it easy for readers to follow the story. This format makes it accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds, including those who may not be well-versed in reading. Additionally, comics are available in multiple languages, making it possible to reach a wider global audience. The strong visuals in comics offer an engaging visual experience that helps readers understand the story and effectively convey emotions and messages. Comics also offer a variety of genres and themes, including superhero comics, adventure comics, scientific comics, fantasy comics, historical comics, and romantic comics. Through various genres, the communication strategies carried out by the Indonesian Ministry of Health in promoting health have a unique appeal and can reach various groups of readers (Cholifah & Adrianto, 2023). Apart from being entertaining and educational, comics can also be used as a means of promoting health literacy. This research focuses on the innovative approach adopted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia in conveying health messages to the public through comics. This approach is a significant breakthrough, as the Ministry of Health usually communicates messages solely through print and electronic media. It is hoped that this approach will reach all levels of society.

The Editors of Sehat Negeri, an Indonesian Ministry of Health publication, are raising several issues, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the new normal. They are urging the public to maintain health protocols and live healthily. Since the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, all individuals must adhere to health protocols. These protocols are a series of preventive measures designed to minimize the transmission risk of the coronavirus and safeguard the health of both individuals and society (Salim et al., 2023). One of the most prevalent health protocols is regularly washing hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds. This simple practice helps remove germs and viruses on hands, reducing the risk of transmission through physical contact with contaminated surfaces (Marta et al., 2023).



**Fig. 1.** Infographic of Effective Communication by WHO  
**Source:** World Health Organization (2023)

The adoption of masks is a critical component of effective health protocols aimed at curbing the spread of infectious diseases like COVID-19. Masks are essential because they cover the nose and mouth, reducing the emission of virus-laden droplets and aerosols produced during activities such as talking, coughing, or sneezing. Additionally, masks provide a barrier that minimizes the wearer’s exposure to viral particles present in the surrounding environment. Hand hygiene and mask usage are complemented by the practice of maintaining physical distance. Keeping a minimum distance of at least one meter from others significantly reduces the risk of inhaling droplets that may contain the virus. This precaution is particularly vital in crowded or enclosed spaces where ventilation is poor. Health protocols also include maintaining cleanliness in personal and shared spaces, avoiding touching the face with unwashed hands, and steering clear of close contact with anyone displaying symptoms of respiratory illness. These practices are designed to protect not only the individual but also the wider community by preventing the transmission of the virus.

The themes of Healthy Comics on the <https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/> web are as follows:

**Table 1.** The themes of Healthy Comics

Comic Title	Link	Designation
CTPS (Cuci Tangan Pakai Sabu)	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/2936687/ctps/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/2936687/ctps/</a>	All Ages
Masker	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/3336640/masker/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/3336640/masker/</a>	All Ages
Positif Covid	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/0336680/positif-covid/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20201120/0336680/positif-covid/</a>	All Ages
Klaster Covid	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/2136629/klaster-covid/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/2136629/klaster-covid/</a>	All Ages
Vaksin Covid	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/1336622/vaksin-covid/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/1336622/vaksin-covid/</a>	All Ages
Disiplin Pakai masker	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/0136589/disiplin-pakai-masker/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200917/0136589/disiplin-pakai-masker/</a>	All Ages
Sembelih Qurban	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200806/3536582/sembelih-qurban/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200806/3536582/sembelih-qurban/</a>	All Ages
Sholat Ied	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200806/4536574/sholat-ied/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200806/4536574/sholat-ied/</a>	All Ages
Thermal Gun	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/0436564/thermal-gun/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/0436564/thermal-gun/</a>	All Ages

Olahraga di AKB	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2736557/olahraga-di-akb/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2736557/olahraga-di-akb/</a>	All Ages
Restoran	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/4936544/restoran/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/4936544/restoran/</a>	All Ages
Pasar	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2836543/pasar/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2836543/pasar/</a>	All Ages
Bengkel	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2236536/bengkel/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/2236536/bengkel/</a>	All Ages
Barbershop	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/4436527/barbershop/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200805/4436527/barbershop/</a>	All Ages
New Normal Ketempat kerja	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/5236513/new-normal-ke-tempat-kerja/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/5236513/new-normal-ke-tempat-kerja/</a>	All Ages
NewNormal	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/5236506/new-normal/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/5236506/new-normal/</a>	All Ages
Lebaran	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/3336497/lebaran/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/3336497/lebaran/</a>	All Ages
Mudik Online	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/1936490/mudik-online/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200605/1936490/mudik-online/</a>	All Ages
Masifnya Tes Covid-19	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0036477/masifnya-tes-covid-19/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0036477/masifnya-tes-covid-19/</a>	All Ages
Gotong Royong	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0036470/gotong-royong/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0036470/gotong-royong/</a>	All Ages
Menjaga Mental	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/1236463/menjaga-mental/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/1236463/menjaga-mental/</a>	All Ages
Sehat Saat Puasa	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/2636455/sehat-saat-puasa/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/2636455/sehat-saat-puasa/</a>	All Ages
Tidak Mudik	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0136448/tidak-mudik/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/0136448/tidak-mudik/</a>	All Ages
Jangan Tolak Jenazah Covid-19	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/5836440/jangan-tolak-jenazah-covid/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200604/5836440/jangan-tolak-jenazah-covid/</a>	All Ages
Kami dirumah saja	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3736430/kami-dirumah-aja/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3736430/kami-dirumah-aja/</a>	All Ages
Kami tetap bekerja	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/0236422/kami-tetap-bekerja/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/0236422/kami-tetap-bekerja/</a>	All Ages
PSBB Series 1	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3336406/psbb/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3336406/psbb/</a>	All Ages
PSBB Series 2	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/0936413/psbb-series-2/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/0936413/psbb-series-2/</a>	All Ages
Disinfektan	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3336399/disinfektan/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/3336399/disinfektan/</a>	All Ages
PSN 3M	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/4636389/psn-3m/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/4636389/psn-3m/</a>	All Ages
Rapid Test	<a href="https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/5036383/rapid-test/">https://sehatnegeriku.kemkes.go.id/baca/komik-sehat/20200603/5036383/rapid-test/</a>	All Ages

Comics can be an effective communication strategy in the marketplace to promote health and influence consumers. They can convey health messages in a light and entertaining way, using humor, engaging narratives, and relatable characters. This approach can help reduce consumer resistance to health messages and make them more acceptable, as demonstrated by Rokom (2021b).



Fig. 2. Sehat Negeriku comic, titled “Pasar”  
Source: Sehat Negeriku Website (2023)

The comic mentioned above is a type of health communication message that is presented visually. Comics are not only exciting and entertaining for readers, but they can also help to establish an emotional connection between the characters in the story and the audience. By using strong narratives and easily identifiable characters, comics can create a sense of emotional closeness that allows readers to connect with the message and values being promoted in health promotion. This can encourage readers to take the desired action. When using comics as a health promotion communication strategy, it is important to consider the characteristics of the intended target market, such as age, cultural preferences, and language spoken. The design and content of the comic should be relevant and appealing to the intended target audience so that the health message can be effectively conveyed.

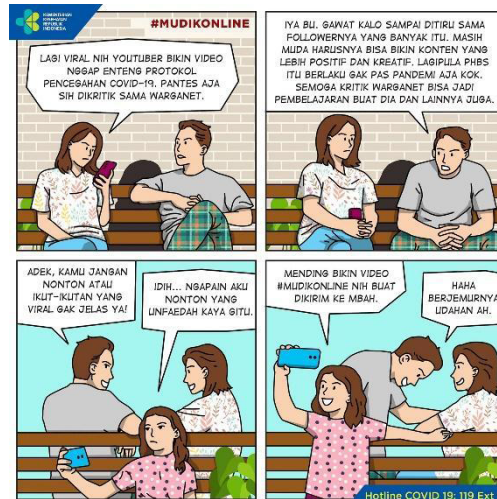
Upon a close examination of the comic titled “Pasar” above, one can observe four panels, each with implicit messages. The first panel depicts a health worker character scanning the forehead of a female character, while a male character rides a motorbike and carries an infant. The accompanying narration explains that while the female character can enter the market, her husband must keep their infant outside the market premises. The underlying message conveyed by this panel is the danger of going to densely populated areas such as markets during the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses significant risks to people of all ages, including infants who are more vulnerable to infections due to their weaker immune systems. As a result, infants are not allowed to enter the market area. The comic effectively uses simplified symbolic representations of characters to convey its message. This illustrates how the symbolic language used in comics serves as a potent tool for message conveyance. Symbols in literature can manifest through various mediums, such as written expressions, images, objects, settings, events, and characters. They serve to enhance the meaning of a message by unifying the underlying themes. Utilizing characterization through symbols allows for an examination of characters by attributing significance to meaningful elements or referencing associations grounded in logic, convention, happenstance, or resemblance (Marliati, 2020).

In the second panel of the “Pasar” comic, the female character continues her journey into the market. She tells her husband to go home and let her know when he’s finished shopping. The panel uses symbolic representation to show buyers engaged in transactions, creating a market atmosphere without overwhelming detail on the commodities. This keeps the focus on the characters. Effective health communication requires an understanding of societal issues. Currently, a primary concern in health communication is its impact on individuals and communities. The objective is to improve health outcomes by sharing relevant health information. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains that health communication involves using communication strategies to share information and influence decisions at both the individual and collective levels, ultimately contributing to better health (Paramasari & Nugroho, 2021).

The third panel depicts a conversation between a seller and a buyer discussing the current circumstances. The female buyer starts the conversation by sharing her experience of following the established protocol before entering the market. In response, the seller explains that they too have to comply with protocols as sellers, which includes taking rapid tests. This exchange of information is reflective of typical communication dynamics in society, without any condescension, and helps in clear comprehension and practical application of the conveyed information in everyday life. This panel aims to utilize health promotion strategies to achieve the vision and mission of health promotion most effectively and efficiently as possible. These strategic endeavors involve various methodologies and approaches, commonly known as “strategies,” which serve as techniques or pathways to achieve the objectives and mission of health promotion successfully and efficiently (Masnaani, 2018).

The fourth panel of the comic book shows sellers and buyers discussing the possibility of closing the market in case of COVID-19 exposure. This emphasizes the importance of following health protocols. The simple communication pattern used in the comic helps readers understand the information quickly and easily. The expectation is that everyone will strictly follow health protocols to minimize harm. The interaction also highlights the need to adhere to government regulations, which is a crucial aspect of promoting public health. Social determinants of health (SDOH) are factors that influence health outcomes. They include environmental conditions that affect an individual’s health risks, functionality, and overall quality of life (Notoadmodjo, 2012).

Comics use visual narrative to tell stories through panel layout, arrangement, and other visual elements. They are an effective tool for teaching various skills such as reading comprehension, visual storytelling, and color recognition (Lubis, 2020). In addition, they are also helpful in conveying important health-related information through engaging visual storytelling and symbolic language to explain complex concepts. Comics use a visual lexicon consisting of color, line, and composition to create emotions and set the mood in line with the content on health-related issues. Ismali (2013) distinguishes between two types of comics: comic strips, which are published in newspapers, and comic books, which are compilations of illustrated narratives known as comics in Indonesia (Prasetiawan & Alhadi, 2018). The picture provided as an example (Rokom, 2021a) is similar to this description.



**Fig. 3.** Sehat Negeriku comic, titled “Mudik Online”  
**Source:** Sehat Negeriku Website (2023)

In the given illustration of Figure 3, we see three characters- a husband, wife, and child sitting together. The child is shown as a silhouette while the wife is busy using her smartphone. She informs her husband about a content creator who is making fun of COVID-19 prevention protocols, which has led to a lot of criticism from netizens. This scene aims to depict the harsh reality of influencers disregarding the COVID-19 prevention rules mandated by the government to create viral content. The visual message urges everyone to follow the established rules. Communication plays a vital role in conveying crucial information, especially regarding public health, to improve community well-being. The seemingly simple illustration carries a profound message by facilitating the audience’s understanding.

In the second panel, the husband’s character responds by pointing out the potential danger that may arise if the influencer’s actions are copied by their followers. He suggests that positive and innovative examples and messages should be provided instead. The husband stresses the importance for younger generations, especially content creators, to set a good example by following the COVID-19 prevention regulations issued by the government. By emphasizing creativity while adhering to the rules, messages can resonate well with followers and wider audiences. This type of communication is known as verbal communication and it is the primary means for humans to express and exchange feelings, ideas, facts, and information, which facilitates understanding and discourse (Kurniati, 2016).

The third panel of the comic book depicts a change in the child character’s point of view. The girl responds to her parent’s advice about not following influencers who disregard COVID-19 protocols by asserting that she will avoid watching anything that is deemed useless. This panel conveys a message that encourages viewers to avoid content that violates established rules. It exemplifies crisis communication where Public Relations activities are used to disseminate relevant messages during crises and establish open communication channels (Omilion-Hodges & McClain, 2016). Presented through child characters using simple language, this panel aims to resonate with readers. By adopting a contemporary children’s style, it aims to motivate the audience to avoid negative influences.

The panel features four female characters who are trying to create an online homecoming video for their grandmother in the village due to the COVID-19 quarantine. Another scene shows a husband and wife ending their sunbathing session, which is recommended during quarantine to boost immunity with morning sunlight. This comic aims to promote public health by utilizing different methods such as print and electronic media to disseminate information and enhance public knowledge, leading to positive behavioral changes in the health sector, as defined by Notoatmodjo (2005) and Jatmika et al. (2019).

## CONCLUSION

Comics play an essential role as a medium for delivering health messages to the public. They have been used as a form of media literacy to disseminate important information and news related to public health. According to Daryanto’s findings in 2010, the inclusion of dialogue in comic visualizations makes them captivating, allowing the emotions portrayed by the characters to significantly impact the engagement of readers and students with illustrated books. Comics can convey messages in a way that is interesting, easy to understand, and accessible to different walks of life. Therefore, as a communication strategy for public health promotion media, comics have been proven effective in disseminating information, increasing knowledge, and influencing general behavior in maintaining health. The use of comics as a health literacy tool by the Indonesian Ministry of Health helps improve the accessibility of health information to the broader



public. To expand the reach and raise awareness about available health comics, the Indonesian Ministry of Health can carry out an active promotional campaign to introduce and distribute health comics to the public using a variety of communication channels, such as social media, websites, healthcare, and schools. This research still has many gaps; therefore, future research can explore the use of comic media as a health literacy tool, such as by comparing health knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors before and after exposure to health comics.

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