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# How public opinion influences personal flashbulb memory formation

Jennifer M. Talarico<sup>1</sup>, Annette Bohn<sup>2</sup> & Ineke Wessel<sup>3</sup>

## Theoretical Framework

According to Berntsen's (2009) model, an event's relevance to one's social group is a necessary (though not sufficient) criterion for flashbulb memory (FBM) formation.

Relevance draws attention to the event, engenders appraisal processes that lead to emotional reactions, and encourages subsequent rehearsal within social groups.

Moreover, the congruence of an event with one's existing beliefs also influences FBM formation.

Events that are congruent with current opinions should be more likely to result in FBM than events that are inconsistent with one's beliefs.

Perception of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster of 11 March 2011 should differ along these dimensions among participants from European countries.

## Predictions



n=55

**Denmark:** little to no nuclear power  
political consensus to maintain status quo  
The event is **not relevant**, therefore we predict **no FBM**



n=105

**Netherlands:** little nuclear-generated electricity  
widespread support to expand nuclear power  
The event is **relevant but incongruent** with popular opinion, so we predict **some, but not many, FBM**



n=105

**Germany:** gradually reducing nuclear-generated electricity  
public opinion broadly opposed to nuclear power  
The event is **relevant and congruent** with popular opinion, therefore we predict **many FBM**

All participants were born between 1990 and 1999 and all groups were predominantly female.

## FBM Frequency & Phenomenology

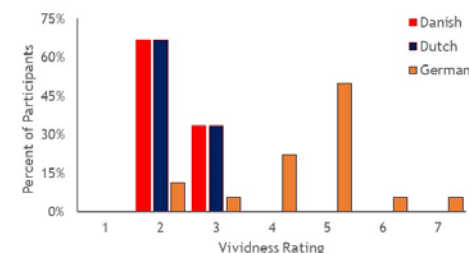
Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when you learned of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan on March 11, 2011?

Only if yes to above

probed recall: source, location, time, others present, ongoing activity, immediate aftermath, dominant emotion, dominant thought, and distinctive details (9 total categories)

AMQ: vividness, reliving, belief in accuracy, emotional valence, emotional intensity, personal significance, rehearsal via thinking, talking, and media consumption (scale 1-7 for all)

|              |             |   |         |   |          |
|--------------|-------------|---|---------|---|----------|
|              |             | = |         | < |          |
| FBM (yes)    | 3 (6%)      |   | 3 (3%)  |   | 18 (17%) |
| FBM (recall) | 1, 8, 8     |   | 4, 7, 8 |   | 6 - 9    |
|              | <i>Mean</i> |   |         |   |          |
| Vividness    | 2.33        |   | 2.33    |   | 4.50     |
| Belief       | 3.00        |   | 3.00    |   | 4.11     |
| Media        | 2.00        |   | 3.33    |   | 4.11     |



## Event Interpretation & Other Differences

All participants were asked (on 7-point rating scales)

Event ratings: how surprising, important and consequential the Fukushima disaster was

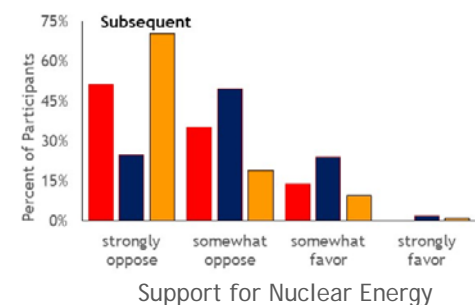
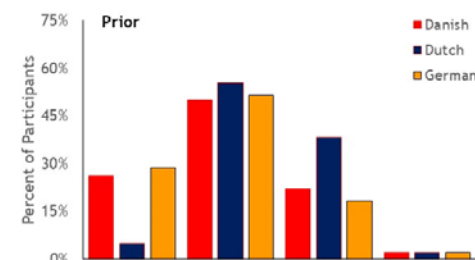
Personal beliefs: support for nuclear energy prior to and after the event

|                     |                  |   |             |   |             |
|---------------------|------------------|---|-------------|---|-------------|
|                     |                  | = |             | < |             |
| Personal Importance | 2.14 (1.31)      |   | 2.53 (1.27) |   | 3.54 (1.32) |
| Consequentiality    | 4.77 (1.23)      |   | 4.67 (.92)  |   | 5.38 (.70)  |
|                     | <i>Mean (SD)</i> |   |             |   |             |

Other FBM: Is there another public event, recent or remote, for which you remember exactly where you were and what you were doing when you learned of that news?

|                |        |       |        |
|----------------|--------|-------|--------|
| Participants → | Danish | Dutch | German |
| Events ↓       |        |       |        |
| Danish         | 13/44  | 0     | 0      |
| Dutch          | 0      | 14/73 | 1      |
| German         | 0      | 3     | 5/66   |

FBM for events of particular relevance to each group



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