

## Sponsored by: Advertisements as intrusive narratives in Indonesian sinetron

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### Abstract

Although an embedded advertisement may not disrupt viewers' attention to the main narrative fully, some research suggest that this ad is still perceived intrusive. Based on that reason, the present study aimed at investigating the embedded advertisement as micro narratives found in three most watched Indonesian sinetron, *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudra*. Advertisements attached in sinetron were classified into three typologies based on how connected they are with the main narrative, including natural, less natural, unnatural. There were two theories underlying this study, namely Coe's intrusive narrative and intrusive advertisement from Edwards et.al. The current research employed descriptive-qualitative method as the data were in the form of textual and visual elements. The data sources were elicited from the latest episodes of three selected sinetron above from the official application or website and validated through investigator by involving linguistic experts. To analyze the data, the researcher employed a theory by Spradley that comprises domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme. The results showed that the unnatural advertisement is the most frequent typology appearing in three selected sinetron and is perceived as intrusive as it intrudes on viewers' accessibility to the sinetron's content.

**Keywords:** embedded advertisement, sinetron, intrusive narrative, marketing

### Introduction

Although social media is growing rapidly in the digital technology era, television still captivates the hearts of millions of viewers, at least in Indonesia. Due to uneven internet signal coverage, television offers effortlessly powerful means to a wide audience to access information, knowledge, or entertainment. For this reason, it seems reasonable that many advertisers still invest a large amount of money in promoting their products on television. There are many ways to advertise products on television. Advertisement is often broadcast as an interruption in the transmission of broadcast programs, well-known as commercial breaks. Nowadays, advertisers are creative enough to smoothly place their product attributes into the storyline of sinetron (Indonesian electronic cinema). What follows is an example of an advertisement promoted explicitly in the middle of sinetron's narrative elicited from *Bintang Samudera*.

Capt. Danu: I just left Rahel, but I already miss her. I promise I will come home to you soon, Rahel. (talking to himself).

Girl: Captain Danu must be sad because now he has to be away from Sergeant Rahel. Ah, I'll take him to eat Roma Arden, so he'll stop being sad. (talking to herself).

Girl: Captain, stop being so sad. I think you should take a bite of this Roma Arden.

Danu: This is my favorite special cookie. When I break the cookie, the chocolate melts.

Girl: Em, so delicious. The chocolate easily melts in my mouth.

Danu: Roma Arden is the most delicious specialty cookie. Crispy on the outside, melted on the inside, flooding the mouth.

Girl: (Finally, Captain Danu is not sad anymore).

Danu: Thanks to Roma Arden, my day is even more special. I love Roma Arden. (kissing the cookie).

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In the marketing domain, the Federal Communications Commission describes the advertising technique above as an embedded advertisement (FCC, 2008). In other literature, this ad might be described as product integration, stealth advertising, or advertainment. Rather, (Pamungkas, 2018) names this type of ad as branding through entertainment industry or entertainment branding. Whatever it might be called, all share the universal meaning that such advertisement aims to incorporate promoted brands into the actor's dialog or plotline in the main show. This might be an escalating response to prior advertising problems where most consumers skip traditional commercial breaks (Cain, 2011).

Unlike most traditional television advertisements, the dialogue above shows that the cookie brand of Roma Arden is promoted explicitly in the plotline. It is said that Captain Danu is sad because he has to be away from his lover, Rahel. Then, Captain Danu is offered to eat Roma Arden, and instantly the cookies can improve his mood. Here, Roma Arden is smoothly embedded into the story plot and is part of the storyline. However, although the embedded advertisement may seem entertaining, some research suggests that this kind of commercial is still perceived as intrusive. More specifically, it distracts viewers' focus from the storyline of the shows.

Various pieces of literature support the notion that advertising on television is intrusive to a distinct degree. Griffin & Pasadeos (1998) applied a t-test to reveal the level of intrusiveness in commercial occurrence. The results showed that television advertisement was considerably more intrusive than magazine advertisement. Another study by Edwards et al. (2002) shared a similar agreement. One of their study's objectives was to examine the intrusiveness degree between related and unrelated advertisements to the editorial content. The findings revealed that incongruent ads with the show's plotline are perceived as more intrusive than congruent ads. Finally, Logan (2013) also admitted that such commercials act as intruders in the television environment. The research investigated consumers' perceptions of advertising on television and online streaming television (OTV). Her study surprisingly showed that an OTV ad was perceived as more intrusive than a traditional TV ad.

Treating advertisement in the middle of sinetron as micro-narratives that presents storylines on macro narratives is the gap left by prior studies. Hence, the present study aims to analyze how such ads introduce macro narratives in sinetron by dividing embedded commercials into three typologies. The three typologies are based on how natural the advertisement connects the sinetron flow in its content, comprising natural, semi-natural, and unnatural. The researcher picked *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudra* as the main object because the three are amongst the most watched sinetron on Indonesian television.

Advertising is a form of product promotion carried out through various media by certain companies or individuals (Richards & Curran, 2002). The advertising plays a crucial role for the media as Tirta et al (2020) suggest that revenues received from the advertising may give a significant impact for the sustainability of the program. Furthermore, to attract audiences, advertisers apply persuasive messages to the content and narrative of the products, services, institutions, or ideas (Bennett, 1988). Various advertising forms can be utilized by advertisers comprising print, broadcast media, or even new media (Kurniullah, 2016). In print media, advertising planners can choose any medium that suits their objectives through several alternatives, such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, packaging, posters, or billboards. On the other hand, in broadcast media, advertisers can use a variety of mediums, including radio, social media, or television.

Television is one of the most popular mediums businesses use to display advertising, mainly because it offers audiovisual content to expose viewers to promoted products (Kuyucu, 2020). In the last 5-10 years, TV advertisements have mainly been spot advertisements during break times and sponsorship quiz-type advertisements. Advertising on TV is, therefore, a very important way for companies to promote their products (Nandaryani & Santosa, 2019). Traditionally, television advertising is attractively packaged to encourage consumers to purchase their products through conventional commercial breaks. However, with modern development, the flow of information and media has expanded, the business world has developed, and how a product is commercialized is intensified. Therefore, as a response to traditional advertising forms on television

where many viewers might skip advertising breaks, the embedded advertisement tries to smoothly accommodate both TV programs and promotional messages in a single unity (Moorman et al., 2002). In the Indonesian context, the embedded advertisement is often seen in sinetron where actors discuss promoted brands in an explicit way. That way, viewers are unlikely to skip such commercials (Nandaryani & Santosa, 2019).

Sinetron, an Indonesian acronym for 'sinema elektronik' or electronic cinema, is a popular tele-cinema program produced locally. Sinetron comprises serials and series or a feature with several episodes (Ida, 2006). It is culturally created with social learning values based on attitudes, behavior, and the viewer's perception of the social reality manifested in the storyline (Nilan, 2001; Udasmoro, 2013). In the modern day, sinetron continues to dominate Indonesian television screens. It was normal practice for the private TV stations to broadcast sinetron starting from early 5 pm to 10 pm. As highlighted by Bintang magazine in January 2021, ten television programs in Indonesia have managed to occupy the top rankings and most of them were dominated by sinetrons (Kurniawan I, 2021). Acquiring high ratings and shares on sinetron correlates with many viewers and becomes a reference for advertisers to place their advertisements in these programs. Therefore, the managers of television stations continue to compete and have elevated hopes of getting benefits from sinetron because of the high rating and share achievements (Rubiyanto, 2022).

Sinetron is amongst television drama programs that simultaneously present stories from various characters. Each character has its storyline without having to summarize it into a conclusion. The story's ending tends to be open-ended and often without completion (Morissan, 2018). One of the main purposes of sinetron is to create viewer empathy and identification through the characters. Characters drive the storyline, leading to major conflicts and other minor conflicts on an ongoing basis. Characters, dialogue, and scenic locations in the storyline must be familiar with viewers' lives, such as at home, store, hotel, office, hospital, or college, so viewers everywhere can relate. Hilliard (2014) asserts that sinetron's storyline is based on the following basic structures such as exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution. As such, sinetron still position itself as the strongest program format in capturing audiences. This is supported by the data showing that sinetron has the highest rating and share among other program formats (Munanjar & Kusumawati, 2019). It is interesting to note that with massive fans, sinetron has advantages, namely the power of selling. Due to a large influence and fan base, advertisers see this big opportunity to incorporate advertisement in sinetron narratives.

Although the embedded advertisement in the sinetron plotline seems more natural than in the broadcast program transmission, the former is still deemed intrusive. Intrusiveness is defined as the interruption of an editorial unit due to the appearance of an advertisement (Ha, 1996). More specifically, psychological aftermath happens when viewers' cognitive processes are interfered. Not all kinds of advertisements can be perceived as intrusive. However, it must interrupt the viewers' goals to be deemed intrusive (Hao Li & Lo, 2015). As mainstream media varies, it is understandable that viewers may enjoy media content of print, radio, television, or online streaming video differently. Hence, the advertisement content is produced to fit a variety of media. For example, if someone listens to the radio, the advertisement is considered intrusive if it blocks access to the radio broadcast or music. In contrast, within the sinetron context, interruption means that the embedded advertisement intrudes viewers' cognitive processes from following the show's storyline (Jennes & Van den Broeck, 2014).

Borrowing the term from the novel point of view, a narrative intrusion is defined as authorial commentary and digression from the main narrative (Sharouf, 2020). The narrator becomes a constant companion throughout the novel plotline that can joke and tease readers. This becomes a feature in which the narrator conveys several additional aspects outside the related main story (Bujak, 2016). In contrast, Coe (1986) sees this phenomenon differently. He assumes that such a narrative intrusion could block readers' imagination of the main storyline due to the appearance of additional characters. In addition, the existence of narrative intrusion can make it difficult for the audience to read the main story, which raises doubts about determining whether the narrative being conveyed is part of the same story as the main story or another story that has no connection with the main story (Kelchner, 1992).

Applying Coe's argument in the sinetron domain, it can be assumed that advertisements incorporated in sinetron are perceived as intrusive. This is because the appearance of the advertisement may distract viewers from following sinetron's storyline, confusing them whether or not the advertisement scene is part of the main story. In an extreme case, viewers may feel annoyed with unexpected products, brands, and logos as they constantly appear in the middle of the story flow. The present study aimed to extend Coe's thought about intrusive narrative to the context of sinetron and treat embedded advertisement as micro-narratives that introduces plotlines of sinetron's macro narratives. This research expands the level of intrusion into three typologies based on how natural the advertisement may appear in the middle of sinetron, namely natural, less natural, and unnatural as follows.

a. Natural

An embedded advertisement is considered natural if it does not interfere with the storyline. As such, the placement of the advertisement has a strong connection with the main narrative. Commonly, it is explicitly narrated through interactions among characters in sinetron.

b. Less Natural

An incorporated ad is considered less natural if they have little connection with the storyline. In this case, the advertisement is not directly narrated by the character. However, its appearance still has a slight correlation with the main narrative. Regularly, attached advertisement is in the form of billboards or posters displayed in the background where the scene occurs.

c. Unnatural

It is considered unnatural if an incorporated advertisement has zero correlation with the plotline of sinetron. Advertisement is commonly displayed in the form of billboards or posters with no connection with the main narrative.

## Method

The researcher employed a descriptive-qualitative method as a research design in this current study. A descriptive approach is utilized to verify a claim or respond to inquiries about the actual state of the research issue. Qualitative research explores and comprehends the issue of a human or social group whose data are elicited in the participant setting, and the researcher analyzes the meanings. In this study, the researchers become the main instrument who conducted activities of watching, finding, and classifying embedded advertisement that intrudes on the storyline. The research data were in the form of textual and visual elements taken from the latest episodes of three of the most watched sinetron in Indonesia, namely *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudra*. To collect the data, the researcher applied a documentation technique that includes searching for sinetron's titles in the official application or website, watching sinetron, taking screenshots of ad scenes, classifying the types of advertisements, and determining the domain of the advertisement types. The data were gathered from the following sources.

**Table 1**  
**Data Sources**

<i>Sinetron's Titles</i>	Sources	Episodes
<i>Ikatan Cinta</i>	RCTI+, YouTube, VISION+	992-1008
<i>Panggilan</i>	Vidio	254-268
<i>Bintang Samudra</i>	Vidio	88-103

To achieve the validity of data, the researcher utilized investigator triangulation to validate the data. The collected data were then analyzed by employing data analysis technique by (Spradley,

2016) which comprises domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme.

## Results and Discussion

This section presented the findings highlighting embedded ads classified into natural, less natural, and unnatural. All data were taken from three chosen sinetron namely *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudera*, and thus analyzed and explained in detail in the discussion section.

### Advertisement Typologies Found in Indonesian Sinetron

The present study analyzed types of embedded advertisements incorporated in the storyline of *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudera*. The data were then classified into three typologies based on how natural they appeared in the sinetron's narrative: natural, less natural, and unnatural. The natural element promotes advertisements using narratives that align smoothly with the storyline. In this case, advertisements are commonly displayed in sinetron scenes through narrative interactions between actors. The actors provide an overview of the advertised product in a scene so that the appearance of the advertisement does not interfere with the main plotline. That way, the ad does not stand out from the main sinetron's narrative, so it does not leave a disturbing impression on the audience during the show.

Meanwhile, the less natural aspect occurs when the advertisements do not follow the sinetron's main story but still have a little relationship between the two. By saying a little relationship, it means that the advertisements displayed have the same place or position where the scene occurs. Accordingly, the main narrative continues to run even though the product billboards, posters, or texts are displayed simultaneously with the ongoing scene. In contrast, the unnatural form happens when attached advertisements do not connect with the sinetron's narrative. As such, such brands in the form of billboards or banners appear without any contributions to the main story. Eventually, it may intrude viewers from following the ongoing sinetron's storyline. The following is the distribution of advertisements perceived as intrusive narratives in *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudera*, classified into natural, less natural, and unnatural.

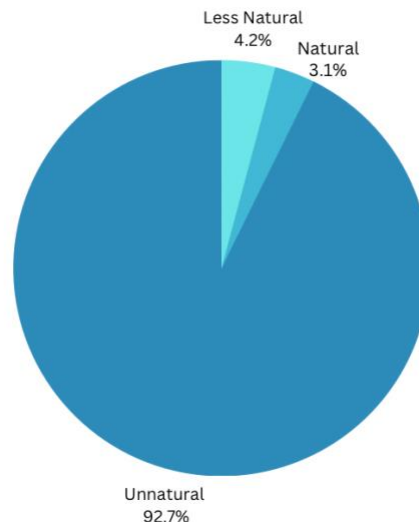
**Table 2**  
**The Distribution of Advertisements in *Ikatan Cinta*,  
*Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudera***

No.	The title of <i>sinetrons</i>	Typologies of Advertisement in Selected <i>Sinetron</i>		
		Natural	Less Natural	Unnatural
1.	<i>Ikatan Cinta</i>	0	0	14
2.	<i>Panggilan</i>	0	3	21
3.	<i>Bintang Samudra</i>	3	1	54
	Total	3	4	89

Based on the table data findings, the present study found 96 data where 3 data is classified as natural, 4 data as less natural, and 89 as unnatural. Most advertisements revealed here were in the visual and textual forms attached in the middle of sinetron's flow. Overall, the current study

revealed interesting findings where the advertisements were mostly dominated by the unnatural form. However, the natural advertisement became the most infrequent data found in this research which was appeared only once. What follows is the percentage of overall data so the reader may have clearer overview of the study's findings.

**Table 3**  
**The Percentage of Overall Data**



### A Closer Look at Each Typology

As has been argued, an intrusion is a psychological response due to the interference of viewers' cognitive process (Hairong Li et al., 2002). The intrusive narrative that prevents viewers from following the main plot may appear in many literary works. Novels and cinemas are without exception. As the two have different mediums in conveying narrative, what is perceived as intrusive in the novel differs from the cinema. In the novel, intrusion occurs when authorial commentary deviates readers from the plotline (Sharouf, 2020). In line with this, Coe (1986) asserts that the appearance of additional characters, mainly the author, may interrupt readers' attention. Thus, they find difficulty in keeping up with the main narrative.

The present study borrowed Coe's main view on the intrusive narrative and applied it in the context of sinetron. The research examines embedded advertisements (treated as micro-narratives) that may intrude viewers from sinetron's macro narratives by classifying them into natural, less natural, and unnatural settings. Intrusive narratives as micro-narratives are considered minor aspects whose appearance affects the storyline of sinetron. The micro-narratives technically interrupt the main plot because their appearance distracts viewers from the ongoing narrative. The followings discuss examples of attached advertisements found in *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, and *Bintang Samudera* classified into three typologies.

#### Unnatural Embedded Advertisements

The current study found that of 94 forms of embedded advertisements, 89 data were categorized as unnatural, making this ad type the most important data (94.7%) compared to its counterparts. More specifically, 14 data were found in *Ikatan Cinta*, 21 were from *Panggilan*, and 54 were from *Bintang Samudera*. Such attached advertisements are classified as unnatural because their appearances have no association with the main narrative of sinetron. An example of an unnatural advertisement found in *Ikatan Cinta* is as follows.

Picture 1  
Example of the Unnatural Embedded Advertisement



The embedded advertisement above is in the form of a billboard in the background and banners at the bottom of the screen. Both types of advertisements contain text and images from the product of a sachet beverage brand in Indonesia. The billboard and banners above are categorized as unnatural due to the placement of advertisements delivered without having a connection with the preceding narratives. In the previous scene, the sinetron's narrative takes place in a house. However, the scene suddenly changes to show the view of urban traffic with the billboard and banners. After showing the advertisement for a few seconds, the scene is returned to portray the house where the characters continue the dialogue in the family room.

#### Less Natural Embedded Advertisements

The embedded advertisement is categorized as less natural when it does not follow the sinetron's storyline but is slightly correlated with the narrative. Forms of billboards, banners, or texts are usually displayed in the same location where the scene takes place. The research findings revealed that this typology only appears four times, responsible for 4.3% of overall data. There are 3 data from Panggilan and 1 data from Bintang Samudera. An example of an unnatural advertisement found in Panggilan is as follows.

Picture 2  
Example of the Less Natural Embedded Advertisement



The attached advertisement above is a billboard and a banner displaying a local detergent brand. The narrative of the ongoing scene shows an actor driving on the street. The actor traverses the advertising billboard in the running car scene, as shown in the picture. Even though such billboard is considered unnatural in the previous category, this case differs. The billboard showing the Daia brand is placed in the background where the scene takes place. In other words, the scene indirectly shows the advertising accompanying the main narrative in this sinetron presented in a smooth transition. Hence, this is what makes the above advertisement considered less natural.

Interestingly, less natural and unnatural advertisements are likely to share similar characteristics as both are displayed without narration in sinetron. However, one of the differences between the two is that the less natural type has a close connection and occurs side by side with the background of the main narrative. In this selected sinetron, this advertisement usually only displays a glimpse of a product where the actors are not involved in promotional narratives.

#### **Natural Embedded Advertisements**

The natural form exposes advertisements by incorporating narratives within the storyline. More specifically, brands are promoted by displaying the product and narrative interactions among characters in a scene. The promoted products are subtly mentioned in the dialog and utilized as actors' properties and thus do not intrude on viewers' attention to the main narrative. Unfortunately, the findings showed that the naturally embedded advertisement only appeared once in *Bintang Samudera*, making this ad type the most insignificant data in the present study. An example of natural advertisement found in *Bintang Samudera* is as follows.

**Picture 3**  
**Example of the Natural Embedded Advertisement**



The scene shows an interaction between the main characters while quickly reviewing a biscuit product incorporated into the dialog. The previous scene shows a doctor who is in the hospital. In the embedded advertisement, the scene is set in a hospital pantry where two nurses and a doctor exchange stories about each other's activities on that day. One of the nurses says that she feels hungry. After all, she does not have time to have lunch because she has quite a tight schedule. The doctor who hears that immediately offers biscuits to the nurse. Eventually, both discuss how delicious the biscuits are and smoothly recommend the biscuits to the viewers. This advertisement is thus classified as natural because it does not intrude the viewers from following the main narrative in sinetron.

#### **Consequences of Intrusive Narratives**

Edwards et al. (2002) conducted an interesting study analyzing characteristics of ads perceived as intrusive. One of their study's objectives is to investigate the level of intrusiveness based on the degree of congruity between the advertisement content and the editorial content. They gathered 379 undergraduate students to participate in the experiment. The findings showed that editorial congruence has a negative association with intrusiveness. That is to say, ads that are incongruent or have no correlation with the main content are perceived as more intrusive than congruent ads. Using this rationale, the following discusses how current typologies of embedded advertisements may affect viewers of sinetron. Unlike its two counterparts, the natural embedded ad is deemed to be the least intrusive because the placement of its advertisement follows the storyline through narrative interactions among the characters in sinetron. The ad placement accompanied by this kind of narrative creates a harmonious impression in its delivery and does not cause big disturbances to the audience. This kind of product placement is considered more conceptual in advertising products because the target market can notice it without commercial breaks that viewers



sometimes miss (Hairong Li et al., 2002) . However, the weakness of this kind of advertisement is that the ad duration is sometimes more than 30 seconds which makes the audience bored.

The less natural attached advertisement may cause less interruption to the sinetron's viewers, compared to the unnatural setting, as the ad shows advertising billboards and banners in the same location where the scene takes place. More specifically, viewers of sinetron still have access, although not much, to the story's main narrative. In contrast, among the three typologies, the unnatural form might be deemed the most intrusive ad as it blocks viewers' accessibility to the sinetron's media content. It sounds arguable as the unnatural format does not involve actors' interaction in promoting advertising products. In addition, the latter also does not incorporate the branded product into the dialog or the main narrative of the plot. Last but not least, the unnatural ad frequently depicts promoted products on billboards or banners in different locations from where the scene takes place.

### Conclusion

Different intrusive narratives are found in three selected Indonesian sinetron: *Ikatan Cinta*, *Panggilan*, *Bintang Samudera*. The present study treated embedded ads as micro-narratives trying to incorporate promoted products into the dialog or plot classified into three typologies: natural, less natural, and unnatural. The natural ad promotes branded products by incorporating narratives from the main storyline of the sinetron. In addition, less natural ad occurs when brands inserted in sinetron do not follow the plot but still have little connection with the main narrative. However, the unnatural ad shows no integration between promoted brands and the plot, and thus it may hinder viewers from accessing the main narrative in sinetron.

Based on the findings, the research found 94 intrusive narratives comprising 89 natural data, 4 less natural data, and 1 natural data. The unnatural format became the most dominant data in the current study. At the same time, the natural setting was the most insignificant finding with only 1 data. More specifically, the most unnatural ad was found in *Bintang Samudera* with 54 data, and the only natural ad found was in this sinetron too. Extending Edwards's rationale in assessing the degree of intrusiveness, the natural ad is perceived as the least intrusive in this study as the ad does not interfere with viewers from keeping up the show's main narrative. In contrast, the unnatural form becomes the most intrusive ad because it intrudes viewers' accessibility to follow the dialog or main plot of sinetron.

Through this research, embedded advertising is considered disturbing because they appear in the middle of the main narrative in Indonesian sinetron. With this in mind, it is hoped that for future research, researchers can further investigate narrative advertisements that disrupt the main storyline of contemporary literary works. This may comprise drama, film series, YouTube series, web series, electronic novels, and books. In the scope of marketing or advertising, future researchers could analyze viewers' attitudes towards intrusive advertisements and how such ads affect future customers' considerations to purchase promoted brands.

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