Thread of Influence: Advertisements as Intrusive Narrative on X

FINA AINUT TUQO[1], CHOIRUM MIFTAH RIHHADATUL AISY[2], CITRA NABILA[3], AFWI MADINATUL ILMI[4], WILDI ADILA[5]

[1,2,3,4,5]*Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia*

[1]226111051@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id
[2]226111043@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id
[3]226111023@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id
[4]226111106@mhs.uinsaid.ac.id
[5]wildi.adila@staff.uinsaid.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explore several types of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising, namely riding the waves, sharing experience, and problem-solution. The data were collected from four X account namely @linskinjournal, @martabakismissu, @kforkinsley, and @glowinbeautyy which are known to frequently incorporating digital storytelling. This study also aims to analyze the level of intrusiveness in digital storytelling based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), which is classified into three types: natural, less natural, and unnatural. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The findings show that sharing experience is the type of digital storytelling most often used by accounts to embed advertising as personal storytelling create authenticity. Problem-solution is the second most frequently used type, while riding the wave is the type of digital storytelling that is rarely used to embed advertising. In addition, based on the level of intrusiveness by Nur Aini et al. (2023), embedded advertising on the digital storytelling is most often natural as the accounts tend to promote their product in a way that is closely related to the story being presented. At the same time, less natural embedded advertising also appears in some posts, where the promotional content is slightly disconnected from the main story.

Keywords: digital storytelling, advertisement, intrusive narrative

Pengaruh Thread: Iklan sebagai Narasi Mengganggu di X

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi beberapa jenis cerita digital yang mengandung iklan tertanam, yaitu mengikuti tren, berbagi penglaman, dan masalah-solusi. Data dikumpulkan dari empat akun X yaitu @linskinjournal, @martabakismissu, @kforkinsley, dan @glowinbeautyy, yang dikenal sering menggunakan cerita digital. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk menganalisis tingkat intrusivitas dalam cerita digital berdasarkan klasifikasi Nur Aini et al. (2023), yang dibagi menjadi tiga jenis: alami, kurang alami, dan tidak alami. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa berbagi pengalaman adalah jenis cerita digital yang paling sering digunakan oleh akun untuk menyisipkan iklan, karena cerita pribadi menciptakan keaslian. Masalah-solusi adalah jenis kedua yang paling sering digunakan, sementara mengikuti tren adalah jenis cerita digital yang jarang digunakan untuk menyisipkan iklan. Selain itu, berdasarkan tingkat intrusivitas menurut Nur Aini et al., (2023) iklan yang disisipkan pada cerita digital tersebut paling sering bersifat alami, karena akun-akun tersebut cenderung mempromosikan produk mereka dengan cara yang erat terkait dengan cerita yang disajikan. Di sisi lain, iklan yang disisipkan secara kurang alami juga muncul dalam beberapa posting, di mana konten promosi sedikit terputus dari cerita utama.

Kata kunci: penceritaan digital, iklan, narasi intrusif

INTRODUCTION

Advertising has long played a significant role in increasing consumer purchase intentions (Madni, Hamid, & Rashid, 2016). To attract consumers, advertisers use various ways, such as continuously reminding consumers about the product and using celebrities to persuade consumers to like and purchase their products (Fan, 2022). Advertisers can use various advertising forms, including print, broadcast, and new media. In print media, advertisers can choose several forms such as magazines, newspapers, posters, billboards, and so on. Whereas in broadcast media, advertisers can choose television, radio, or even social media as their medium (Nur Aini et al., 2023).

In recent years, advertising is no longer limited to traditional forms such as commercial breaks due to the development of technology. Instead, advertisers use

creative ways to deliver promotional messages. One such approach is embedded advertising, a term introduced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC, 2008), in which the promotional content is seamlessly integrated into the main content. Rather than interrupting the viewer's experience, the advertisement becomes part of the program itself which allows advertisers to promote their products in a natural context and decrease the probability of audience rejection (Maricic et al., 2019). Instead of explicitly using persuasive language, advertisers use a storytelling technique that reflects users' everyday experiences.

When storytelling combines with technology, it refers to digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is the process of creating stories utilizing digital technology to create engaging and creative narratives (Ramalia, 2023). It involves using digital media such as images, and videos, to enhance the storytelling experience. As media consumption continues to shift toward digital platforms, social media has emerged as a powerful space for storytelling. One of the most widely used platforms for digital storytelling is X (formerly Twitter), which helps people to share stories with images, interactive content, and brief messages.

Compared to other platforms, X stands out for its face-paced communication style. One of its key features is retweets, which allow users to instantly share other users' posts with their own followers, thereby expanding the reach and interaction of those messages (Firdaus, Ding, & Sadeghian, 2018). Another important feature is hashtags which allow users to join trending conversations and increase content visibility (Park & Kaye, 2019). Digital storytelling on X is also commonly used as a place for embedded advertising. On X, advertisers embed their promotional content into posts that resemble regular user content, such as personal stories, influencer posts, or entertainment threads to influence consumers' perception and behavior, while minimizing the perception of overt commercial intent.

Digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on the X platform can be categorized into three distinct types: riding the wave, sharing experience, and problem-solution. In the marketing context, riding the waves is an idiom that refers to the strategy of integrating current trends or viral moments to increase engagement. This is in line with Kim & Mauborgne (2015) in their work on Blue Ocean Strategy that highlighted the significance of building uncontested market space by creatively adapting to shifting customer preferences and market dynamics. By tapping into what people are currently interested in, marketers can make their content more

relevant and engaging. On X, this category appeared in the form of digital storytelling aimed at riding the wave of virality to reach a broader audience.

Sharing experience is a strategy in which a content creator shares a relatable story that depicts daily experience or circumstances that many people experience. This strategy is effective to foster emotional connections with the audience. As Mulyani (2024) stated that building emotional connections can foster common ground between brands and consumers, making them more passionate and loyal. This form of storytelling usually invites empathy, familiarity, and a sense of togetherness, as the audience can feel represented in the story.

Problem-solution is one category of digital storytelling that combines storytelling about a particular issue, followed by the direct presentation of a solution. The account owner then introduces a product as the "solution" to the issue described. This solution is typically inserted seamlessly within the narrative or at the end of the post. Through this approach, advertisers can engage audiences emotionally while subtly promoting the product as a helpful and trustworthy answer to their problems. Embedded advertising in digital storytelling is subtly disguised as part of the narrative. Because the advertisements are presented in the form of engaging stories or relatable experiences, they often appear entertaining and seamlessly integrated into the overall content.

However, although embedded advertising may seem entertaining and seamlessly integrated, they can still be perceived as intrusive. Advertisements inserted into the storyline can disrupt the natural flow of the narrative and reduce readers' engagement with the original content. This situation refers to intrusive narrative. As stated by Edwards, Li, & Lee (2002) in their theory on intrusive narratives, the narrative element in advertising can subtly enter the consumer's mind and reduce resistance that typically arises when they become aware that they are being persuaded. In line with that, Nur Aini et al. (2023) agree intrusive narrative is a strategy where advertisements are embedded within a story in such a way that they disrupt the viewer's ability to distinguish between the narrative and the promotional content.

Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023) intrusive narrative categorizes into three types based on their level of intrusiveness with the story, namely natural, less natural, and unnatural. Embedded advertising is considered natural if it does not disrupt the narrative. In this context, products offered are still related to the initial narrative.

Furthermore, the advertisement is considered less natural if it shows only a slight connection to the narrative. While it still appears within the content, it is not directly involved in the storytelling and may seem somewhat detached. Additionally, embedded advertising is considered unnatural if it has no correlation with the story. In this context, the products are completely not related to the narrative. The following is an example of digital storytelling that contains embedded advertising on X.

Figure 1. Data sample of @linskinjournal about Sharing Experience

Sample data taken from digital storytelling sharing experiences by @linskinjournal. The thread shows sharing experiences of digital storytelling as the story focuses on sharing personal experience, about her experience in measuring her breasts correctly allows her to choose a bra that is more comfortable and pleasant to wear. The story tells how to measure breasts so people don't get the wrong size when buying a bra. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded clothes meter. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023) theory, figure 1 the embedded advertising is considered as natural as the embedded advertising does not interfere with the storyline. The embedded advertising includes a link to where clothes meter can be purchased without disrupting the storyline.

Previous studies have examined digital storytelling in various ways, particularly marketing and social media. Lina & Aisulu (2025) highlights that the effectiveness of digital storytelling in tourism marketing lies in its ability to create emotional connections with audiences through cultural authenticity, cultural resonance, technology integration, and multi-platform distribution strategies.

While Ersoy (2025) identified elements such as character development, emotional appeal, and the use of multimedia formats as a key to effective digital storytelling. At a broader level, Umoren et al. (2022) emphasized aligned digital storytelling strategy with generational values, media habits, and platform-specific expectations—can further drive authentic engagement and trust. On social media, Noor, Wirayudha, and Fatimah (2025) found that brand trust and digital storytelling positively affect purchasing decisions for skin care products. Nicoli et al.(2022) found that digital storytelling videos in social media are most effective when they evoke universal emotional elements.

Prior studies have explored digital storytelling in marketing, the appeal of storytelling, and the influence of digital storytelling on culture and decision making. Most of these studies focus on digital storytelling strategies in social media and marketing that can trigger positive decisions from audiences towards an advertisement. The gap left by previous studies is the forms of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on X and the types of intrusive narratives that exist in digital storytelling containing embedded advertising. Therefore, we formulate two questions: in what types of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising appearing on the X accounts @linskinjournal, @martabakismissu, @kforkinsley, and @glowinbeautyy? And what types of intrusive narratives are found in digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on the X accounts of @linskinjournal, @martabakismissu, @kforkinsley, and @glowinbeautyy?.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative research design to examine the types of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising. This design provides deep analysis on how embedded advertising is embedded within the narrative and how each type can be categorized based on its level of intrusiveness, following the framework of Nur Aini et al. (2023). The data from this study were sourced from some X accounts that are known for frequently incorporating digital storytelling containing embedded advertising. X was chosen as the research site because many advertisers present products in the form of long narratives that can make readers interested in their writing. To collect the data, the researchers selected advertisement threads accounts from *@linskinjournal, @martabakismissu, @kforkinsley,* and *@glowinbeautyy* that display digital storytelling containing

embedded advertising on

X. The data collection involved taking screenshots of digital storytelling posts, classifying the types of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising, and identifying the intrusiveness of each digital storytelling containing embedded advertising type.

This article employs Spradley (2016) ethnographic framework to analyze the data, emphasizing the social and cultural meanings of language, narrative, and online interaction. Using Spradley's approach, this study aims to understand how digital storytelling functions both as a cultural practice within the X user community and as an advertising strategy. Spradley (2016) data analysis consists of four stages: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural themes analysis. In domain analysis, the researchers selected digital storytelling. In taxonomy analysis, the researchers classified the types of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising found on X into three types, and the types of intrusiveness based on Nur Aini et al. (2023) into three types. In componential analysis, the researchers combined digital storytelling containing embedded advertising and level of intrusiveness by Nur Aini et al. (2023). In the final stage, in cultural themes, the researchers interpret the underlying meaning that emerges from all data categories.

Table 1 Digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on X

Digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on X									
	Riding The Waves			Sharing Experience			Problem-Solution		
	N	L	U	N	L	U	N	L	U
@linskinjournal	✓			✓			✓	✓	
@martabakismissu				✓	✓		✓		
@kforkinsley	✓			✓					
@glowinbeautyy				✓			✓		

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers presented the finding of typologies digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on X. These typologies are riding the wave, sharing experience, and problem-solution. This section also presented the findings of digital storytelling containing embedded advertising on X based on the level of intrusiveness appearing in the narrative, utilizing Nur Aini et al. (2023) theory which classified into three types, namely natural, less natural, and unnatural.

Riding The Waves

Figure 2. Data sample of @linskinjournal about Riding the Wave

Figure 2 shows riding the wave of digital storytelling as the story follows trending topics about SLS-free shampoo. The story tells a recommendation from the doctor with the aim of taking advantage of viral trends to reach a wider audience. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded probiotic dandruff shampoo. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 2, the embedded advertising is considered as natural as the embedded advertising does not interfere with the storyline. The embedded advertising includes a link to where probiotic dandruff shampoo can be purchased without disrupting the storyline.

Figure 3. Data sample of @kforkinsley about Riding the Wave

Figure 3 shows riding the wave of digital storytelling as the story follows trending topics about self-transformation. The story about self-transformation in Figure 3 was chosen with the aim of taking advantage of viral trends to reach a wider audience. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded some link products. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 3, the embedded advertising is considered as natural as the embedded advertising does not interfere with the storyline. The embedded advertising includes a link to where the soft lenses can be purchased without disrupting the storyline.

Sharing Experience

Figure 4. Data sample of @linskinjournal about Sharing Experience

Figure 4 shows sharing experiences of digital storytelling as the story focuses on sharing personal experience, about renovating and changing the layout of the bedroom. The story is about replacing the peer mattress with a full foam mattress, purchasing microfiber pillows and purchasing plain bed sheets to make the bedroom more comfortable. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded some link products. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 4, the embedded advertising is considered as natural as the embedded advertising does not interfere with the storyline. The embedded advertising includes a link to where mattress, pillow, bed sheets, furniture, and room accessories can be purchased without disrupting the storyline.

Figure 5. Data sample of @martabakismissu about Experience

Figure 5 shows sharing experience in digital storytelling, as the story focuses on the body care routine of someone with diabetes. This thread talks about body care and the step-by-step process used to conceal the scars commonly experienced by people with diabetes. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author inserts links to cream products, body scrub products, and skin health supplements. Based on the theory of Nur Aini et al. (2023), the embedded advertising in Figure 5 is considered natural because they do not interfere with the flow of the story. These embedded advertising include links to where the body care products used can be purchased without disrupting the story's flow. However, at the of the thread, the author inserts an additional post that offer perfume which leads to

the shift of the topic. Therefore, this thread contained two levels of intrusiveness, natural in the narrative and less natural in the last section about parfum.

Figure 6. Data sample of *@kforkinsley about* Sharing Experience

Figure 6 shows sharing experience of digital storytelling as the story focuses on sharing personal experience. The story is about a holiday experience in Bangkok. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded a backpack product link. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 6 the embedded advertising is considered as natural as the embedded advertising does not interfere with the storyline. The embedded advertising includes a link to where the backpack can be purchased without disrupting the storyline.

Figure 7. Data sample of @glowinbeautyy about Sharing Experience

Figure 7 shows sharing experiences of digital storytelling as the story focuses on sharing personal experience of finding a sausage that tastes surprisingly good yet comes at an affordable price. In the thread, the author provides detailed information about her preference, including the type of sausage she bought, the flavour, the size, and even how she cooks it at home. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded link to buy the saussage. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 7 can be categorized as natural embedded advertising, since the advertisement blends seamlessly within the narrative and the promotional element does not interrupt the flow of the story.
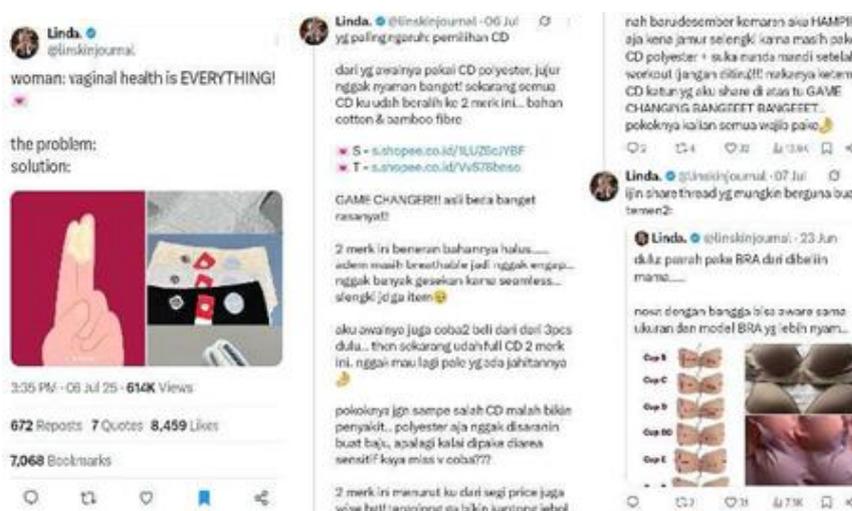
Problem-Solution

Figure 8. Data sample of @linskinjournal about Problem-Solution

Figure 8 shows problem-solutions of digital storytelling as the story highlights common issues related to women's hygiene, particularly the risk of infection caused by poor cleanliness habits. The author shares her personal experience of almost getting a fungal infection due to lack of care and then provides several solutions to maintain feminine hygiene. She recommends wearing underwear made of breathable materials. In addition, she suggests using comfortable sanitary pads during menstruation and maintaining vaginal health by keeping the area dry and consuming prebiotics and probiotics. The author also inserts links to purchase the items. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), the level of intrusiveness in figure 8 is dominated by natural embedded advertising, as most of the promoted products are integrated into the personal and educational narrative about women's health. However, at the end of the

thread, there is a shift in topic to bra products that only have a little connection with body awareness, so this part is classified as less natural embedded advertising. Thus, this thread contains two levels of intrusiveness, which are natural at the core of the narrative, and less natural in the additional section.

Figure 9. Data sample of @martabakismissu about Problem-Solution

Figure 9 shows problem solutions of digital storytelling as the story focuses on common problems regarding skin discoloration or differences in skin color due to sunburn. It explains the solution to removing skin discoloration by routinely using body care products, such as cleansing cream. This story shows embedded advertising as in the middle of the story, the author embedded some bodycare product link. Based on Nur Aini et al.(2023), figure 9 is considered as natural as the embed advertising does not interfere with the storyline.

Figure 10. Data sample of @glowinbeautyy about Problem-Solution

Figure 10 shows the problem solution of digital storytelling as the author tells her skin problem, specifically centered on a facial skin that suddenly becomes oily. This story presents a convincing solution to the problem through the recommendation to use sunscreen. The author suggests using sunscreen that is light in texture, quickly absorbed, and does not cause a white cast, so that the skin is no longer oily. The embedded advertising includes a shopping sunscreen link. Based on Nur Aini et al. (2023), figure 10 is considered as natural as the sunscreen advertising does not interfere with the storyline.

CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis of the three types digital storytelling containing embedded advertising accounts on X platform showed that sharing experience is the type of digital storytelling that is most used by accounts to embed advertising, as personal experience creates a sense of authenticity and trust that make the advertisements feel relatable. Additionally, problem-solution is the second most frequently used type of digital storytelling to embed advertising, as this type fits well with marketing goals, which highlights a need and offers a product or service as the solution. Meanwhile, riding the wave is the type of digital storytelling that is rarely used to embed advertising, because it relies on trend and viral moments, which carries risk of the content becoming irrelevant or losing engagement after the trend fades.

Furthermore, based on the intrusiveness that was proposed by Nur Aini et al. (2023), across the three typologies, advertisements are most often embedded naturally, as the accountants tend to promote their product in ways that are closely related to the story being presented, so that the promotional message can be delivered without disrupting the storyline. This approach can make the audience perceive the advertisement as part of the storyteller's personal experience or recommendation, thus reducing rejection from the audience and the reason for the increased engagement.

In addition, less natural also appears in some posts, where the promotional content is slightly disconnected from the main story. In this case, after sharing a story and promoting a product that aligns with the narrative, the author adds a new post that is unrelated to the previous story or product. However, this does not significantly disrupt the overall flow because the author maintains a consistent tone,

writing style, and interaction pattern across posts, which preserve continuity and familiarity for the audience. The intention of the additional post is to reintroduce or promote another product.

The findings offer practical implications for marketers and content creators of the importance of authenticity and narrative coherence in building trust and engagement in the digital advertising space. Building on the findings, future studies could expand this typology by examining how audiences emotionally respond to each narrative form or by comparing embedded advertising practices across different digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube. Expanding the analysis beyond X platform could provide a broader understanding of how narrative strategies adapt to the distinctive features and audience behaviors of each platform. Additionally, future research could also examine audience reception studies to explore how users interpret and respond to different levels of intrusiveness in narrative-based advertising.

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