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Lost in Regulation Ethical Breaches in Indonesian Advertising through a Systematic Literature Review

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Lost in Regulation: Ethical Breaches in Indonesian Advertising through a Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how criticism of advertising has been discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship and how these critiques can be mapped onto the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI). Using a systematic literature review, this study analyzed 123 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2004 and 2023 in SINTA-indexed Indonesian communication journals. The search used the keywords "komunikasi pemasaran," "marketing communication," "advertising," "advertisement," "periklanan," and "iklan," followed by manual screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts. The findings identify ten dominant themes: exploitation of gender and sexuality, discrimination and social representation bias, power domination and capitalism, advertising camouflage and blurring boundaries, commodification of religion, visual manipulation and hyperreality, inappropriate advertising for children, misleading information, exaggerated claims and puffery, and intrusive digital advertising. These themes can be mapped onto EPI provisions concerning women, gender, pornography and pornoaction, religion and culture, halal claims, children, misleading language, product benefits, hyperbole, embedded advertising, digital media, privacy, and database practices. However, EPI has been explicitly and systematically used as an analytical framework in only a limited number of studies. Most articles criticize advertising through semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, political economy, media sociology, or discourse analysis without operationalizing EPI as the primary framework. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory, this article interprets this pattern as limited resonance between professional self-regulation and academic observation.

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising is the focal point of the modern communicative sphere (Dyer, 2008)—an economic activity (Kopf et al., 2011) and a social communicative code (Huth, 1995)—that, in an increasingly functionally differentiated society such as Indonesia, can transform public perception and sociocultural identity (Bazarcı, 2022; McDonald et al., 2020). Advertising does not function solely on a denotative level by presenting product information; rather, it delivers a broader message as a symbolic transfer that influences understandings of gender (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019), religion (Ansari & Hyder, 2023), social strata (Livas, 2020), and macro-ideologies (Zhao & Belk, 2008). Consequently, at the intersection of traditional and digital distribution, advertising becomes an ethically controversial arena for the contestation of meaning.

The Indonesian advertising market grows in a complex, diverse, and religious socio-cultural environment. In the context of consumption, advertising not only fosters economic activity (Arens & Weigold, 2017; Yanti & Gusfa, 2022) but also becomes a vehicle for reinstating gendered norms through the physical representation of women (Wicaksono, 2012; Widiastuti et al., 2023; Fernandez, 2011; Yanti A. D., 2016), religious beliefs through the promotion of halal goods (Arbak et al., 2019; Mandjusri, 2017; Karimah et al., 2019), and nationalist agendas (Tikhomirova et al., 2015). Thus, regulations that go beyond the mere fairness of information are urgently needed to provide ethical guidance concerning social rights, human dignity, and cultural engagement (Perdana, 2022; Schauster, 2019; Feenstra & Esteban, 2019).

In Indonesia, the primary instrument for advertising ethics regulation is the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI) (Dewan Periklanan Indonesia, 2020). The latest edition of EPI has expanded its scope to address developments in digital media, algorithmic advertising, social media, native advertising, and the protection of vulnerable audiences (Astuti, 2017; Dinanti & Hadi, 2021; Pasandaran, 2018; Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2019; Hotkar et al., 2023). As a self-regulatory framework, EPI provides normative guidance for advertising practice in Indonesia. However, the effectiveness of advertising self-regulation depends not only on the existence of ethical codes, but also on how such codes are understood, institutionalized, and operationalized by relevant stakeholders, including practitioners, regulators, educators, and scholars (Belch & Belch, 2021; Moitra et al., 2022; Floridi, 2021; Feenstra & Esteban, 2019; Schauster, 2019).

Despite the existence of EPI, ethical concerns in Indonesian advertising continue to be discussed across different academic approaches. Relevant studies have examined advertising through semiotics (El Ghiffary & Widana, 2023; Arnie et al., 2017), gender theory (Yanti A. D., 2016), sociology of media (Trijayanto, 2017), and cultural studies (Mutahir et al., 2019). However, only a limited number of studies have explicitly used EPI as a systematic analytical framework. This indicates a gap between professional advertising ethics and academic research: Indonesian communication scholarship has critically examined advertising practices, but has not always translated those critiques into the normative categories provided by the industry's own ethical code (Joaquin & Biana, 2020).

Therefore, this study aims to systematically review how criticism of advertising has been discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship and how these critiques can be mapped onto the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI). Rather than directly measuring advertising industry compliance, this article focuses on academic observation: how Indonesian communication studies identify, classify, and interpret ethical issues in advertising. This focus is important because previous studies have criticized Indonesian advertising through semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, media sociology, and other approaches, yet only a limited number of studies have explicitly operationalized EPI as a systematic analytical framework. Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What are the dominant themes of advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship from 2004 to 2023? (2) How can these themes be mapped onto the provisions of the 2020 Indonesian Advertising Ethics? (3) To what extent has EPI been explicitly referenced and operationalized as an analytical framework in Indonesian advertising scholarship?

The contribution of this study is twofold. Empirically, it maps the dominant themes of advertising criticism and their relationship to EPI provisions. Theoretically, it uses Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory (1995; 2013) to interpret the limited operationalization of EPI in academic communication as a problem of weak resonance between professional self-regulation and scholarly observation, rather than simply as a matter of individual ignorance, moral failure, or total regulatory breakdown.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The Dynamics and Limitations of Advertising Self-Regulation

Globally, self-regulation does not always work as effectively as expected. Perelló-Oliver & Muela-Molina (2014) found differences between the UK and Spain when assessing institutional independence and regulatory oversight to preserve industry independence. Furthermore, Campbell & Grimm (2018) noted that emerging ethical challenges—such as native advertising—can blur the boundaries between informational and persuasive intent, indicating the need for stronger mechanisms. Conversely, Farrell (2012) found that in the UK, practitioners' compliance is primarily driven by the institutional authority and public acceptance of ethical standards. Taken together, these studies suggest that the effectiveness of advertising self-regulation depends not only on the normative text itself, but also on how ethical standards are institutionally supported, publicly recognized, and connected to industry interests.

Social Systems Theory, Self-Regulation, and Second-Order Observation

To interpret the relationship between advertising ethics, academic research, and professional self-regulation, this study draws on Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory (Luhmann, 1995; 2000; 2013). In Luhmann's theory, modern society is functionally differentiated into social systems that reproduce themselves through communication. Society does not consist of individuals as its basic elements, but of communication. Human beings participate in communication, but as psychic systems, they remain in the environment of social systems rather than functioning as the elements of society itself (Luhmann, 1995; 2013). This distinction is important because the limited visibility of advertising ethics cannot be reduced merely to individual ignorance, moral failure, or the unwillingness of particular actors to follow ethical rules.

From this perspective, EPI can be understood as a form of normative communication produced within advertising self-regulation. It formulates expectations about what advertising should and should not do. However, such expectations do not automatically become operative within academic communication, industry practice, or public discourse. They must be reconstructed within the communicative operations of each system. Therefore, when Indonesian advertising studies criticize advertisements through semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, media sociology, or other frameworks without explicitly operationalizing EPI, this does not necessarily indicate the total failure of EPI. Rather, it suggests limited resonance between professional self-regulation and scholarly observation.

This argument is also relevant to discussions on advertising education and ethical competence. Ethical regulation gains stronger social relevance when it is supported by academic research, professional education, and empirical analysis (Andrews & Shimp, 2018; Jones et al., 2022). However, the academic system does not simply reproduce professional codes as they are. It observes, selects, translates, and reconstructs them through its own concepts, research problems, theories, and methods. For this reason, the limited use of EPI in advertising scholarship should be examined not only as a regulatory issue but also as a problem of how ethical norms become visible within academic communication.

This article uses Luhmann's theory to interpret this pattern. The theory is not used as a coding instrument for classifying the reviewed articles. The empirical classification remains based on thematic categories and the provisions of the 2020 EPI. Luhmann's theory is used to explain how the reviewed articles observe advertising ethics and how this SLR, in turn, observes those academic observations. In this sense, the study operates as a second-order observation of Indonesian communication scholarship on advertising ethics and self-regulation (Luhmann, 2000; 2013).

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to examine how criticism of advertising has been discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship and how these critiques can be mapped onto the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI). The SLR approach was selected because it enables a transparent, replicable, and structured synthesis of existing academic literature (Page et al., 2021; Petticrew & Roberts, 2006; Gough et al., 2017). In this study, the SLR was not used merely to collect previous studies, but to identify recurring themes of advertising criticism, examine their relationship to EPI provisions, and assess the extent to which EPI has been explicitly operationalized as an analytical framework in Indonesian communication scholarship.

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Population and Sampling

The population for this study was drawn from communication journals indexed in SINTA (Science and Technology Index). A total of 131 communication-related journals constituted the journal source base. These journals consisted of 21 journals indexed in SINTA 2, 19 journals indexed in SINTA 3, 49 journals indexed in SINTA 4, and 42 journals indexed in SINTA 5. The SINTA distribution is reported to clarify the publication context of the reviewed literature, rather than to treat journal ranking as a direct measure of the methodological quality of individual articles.

Article collection was conducted by exploring the website of each journal and using the available keyword search functions. The search strategy began with broader terms and then narrowed to more specific terminology in both Indonesian and English, following the logic of systematic searching proposed by Gough et al. (2017). The keywords used were: “komunikasi pemasaran” OR “marketing communication*” OR “advertising” OR “advertisement*” OR “periklanan” OR “iklan.” These keywords were selected to capture articles discussing advertising, marketing communication, advertising criticism, and ethical issues in advertising.

The year 2004 was selected as the starting point because this review aimed to trace scholarly discussions published after the 2004 edition of the Indonesian Advertising Ethics. The 2004–2023 period allows this study to examine how advertising criticism and EPI-related concerns have been discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship over nearly two decades.

To ensure sample quality and minimize bias, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied (Littell et al., 2008; Jesson et al., 2011). The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) research articles published in SINTA-indexed communication journals; (2) articles published between 2004 and 2023; (3) articles whose titles, abstracts, or contents discussed advertising studies, marketing communication, or critiques of advertising with explicit or implicit ethical dimensions; (4) articles written in Indonesian or English; and (5) articles available in full text. The exclusion criteria excluded opinion articles or non-academic essays, studies unrelated to advertising in Indonesia, articles lacking ethical relevance, duplicate articles, and articles with incomplete citation information.

Research Procedures

The research procedure consisted of three main stages: article identification, article screening, and final synthesis. In the identification stage, articles were collected from the websites of SINTA-indexed communication journals using the predetermined keywords. This stage resulted in 126 articles related to advertising criticism, marketing communication, and ethical issues in advertising. In the screening stage, the titles, abstracts, and full texts of the identified articles were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Three articles were excluded because they did not sufficiently meet the criteria for final synthesis. As a result, 123 articles were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The selection process is presented in figure-1.

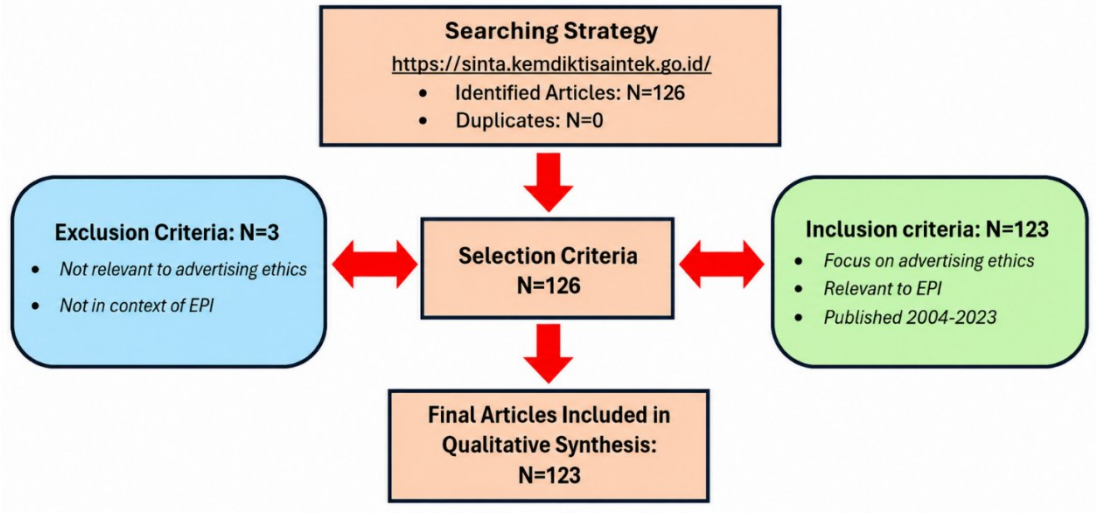


figure-1 SLR Study Selection

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Data from the selected articles were extracted manually into a spreadsheet to ensure transparency and auditability. The extraction sheet included the following information: (1) article title; (2) year of publication; (3) journal name; (4) SINTA ranking of the journal; (5) research method; (6) main theme of advertising criticism; (7) subtheme; (8) relevant EPI provision; (9) whether the article explicitly mentioned EPI; and (10) key findings relevant to advertising ethics. This procedure follows the principle that systematic reviews should make the process of selection, extraction, and synthesis visible and traceable (Patole, 2021; Gough et al., 2017).

The extracted data were then analyzed using thematic narrative synthesis. First, the articles were grouped according to the dominant themes of advertising criticism. Second, these themes were mapped onto relevant provisions of the 2020 Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Dewan Periklanan Indonesia, 2020). Third, the articles were assessed based on the extent to which they explicitly referenced and operationalized EPI as an analytical framework. This classification was necessary because not all articles that criticized advertising explicitly used EPI. Some articles directly mentioned EPI and identified specific provisions, while others discussed advertising ethics or criticized advertising practices through semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, media sociology, or other frameworks.

Accordingly, this study distinguishes between four levels of EPI visibility in the reviewed literature: articles that explicitly mention EPI and identify relevant provisions; articles that discuss advertising ethics without specifying EPI provisions; articles that do not mention EPI but can be analytically related to EPI provisions; and articles that discuss broader advertising criticism without sufficient basis for article-level EPI classification. This distinction allows the study to examine the visibility of EPI in Indonesian communication scholarship without assuming that every criticism of advertising automatically constitutes a formal EPI violation or that every article in the corpus operationalizes EPI in the same way.

Theoretical Interpretation

Beyond the empirical synthesis, Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory (1995; 2013) provides the theoretical foundation for interpreting the findings. In this study, Luhmann's theory is not used as the primary coding instrument for classifying the reviewed articles. The coding process remains based on thematic categories of advertising criticism and their analytical relationship to the provisions of the 2020 Indonesian Advertising Ethics.

Instead, Luhmann's theory is used as an interpretive framework to understand how EPI appears, disappears, or becomes only partially visible within academic communication. In this sense, the reviewed articles are treated as academic observations of advertising, while this SLR functions as a second-order observation of how Indonesian communication scholarship observes advertising ethics and self-regulation.

This distinction is important because the limited use of EPI in the reviewed literature should not be understood simply as individual ignorance, moral negligence, or the total failure of advertising self-regulation. Rather, it can be interpreted as a problem of limited resonance between professional self-regulation and academic communication. EPI formulates normative expectations about advertising, but these expectations become analytically visible only when they are reconstructed within scholarly communication as concepts, categories, or analytical frameworks.

Ethical Considerations

Given that this study is a systematic literature review relying entirely on publicly available, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, formal institutional ethical approval involving human participants was not required. Nevertheless, this study complies with standard research ethics by applying transparent selection criteria, documenting the review procedures, and reporting the findings accurately in accordance with PRISMA 2020 principles (Page et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the systematic literature review. The results are organized according to the three research questions: first, the dominant themes of advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship; second, the mapping of these themes onto the provisions of the 2020 Indonesian Advertising Ethics; and third, the extent to which EPI has been explicitly referenced and operationalized as an analytical framework in the reviewed literature.

Corpus Profile and Source Base

The journal source base consisted of 131 communication-related journals indexed in SINTA. These journals were distributed across four SINTA rankings: 21 journals in SINTA 2, 19 journals in SINTA 3, 49

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journals in SINTA 4, and 42 journals in SINTA 5. This distribution is presented in figure-2. The SINTA ranking is reported here to describe the publication context of the reviewed literature, not to treat journal ranking as a direct measure of article-level methodological quality. The journal source base was used to identify articles discussing advertising, marketing communication, and ethical issues in advertising.

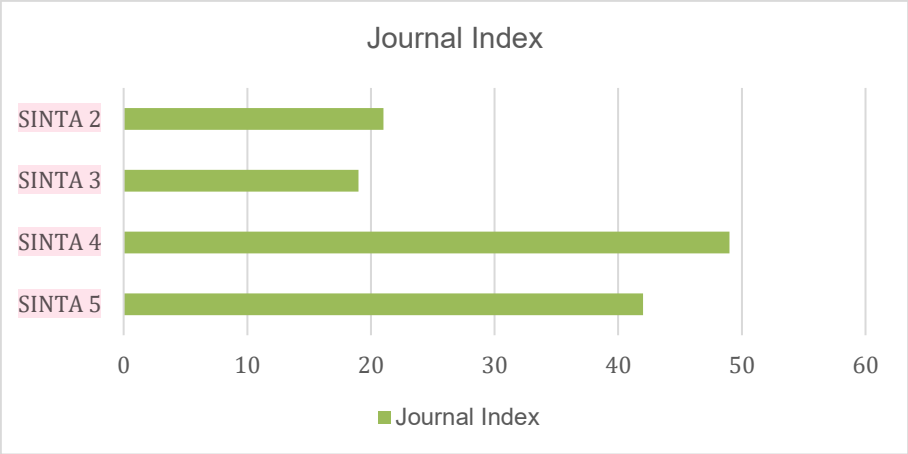


figure-2 Distribution of SINTA-Indexed Communication Journals

Research Question-1: Dominant Themes of Advertising Criticism

To answer the first research question, the 123 reviewed articles were analyzed to identify the dominant themes of advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship from 2004 to 2023. The analysis shows that advertising criticism is not concentrated on a single issue but distributed across several recurring themes. These themes include gender and stereotypes, discrimination and social representation bias, domination and capitalism, advertising camouflage and blurred boundaries, commodification of religion, visual manipulation, child-targeted advertising, misleading information, exaggerated claims, and digital intrusiveness. The distribution of these themes is presented in figure-3.

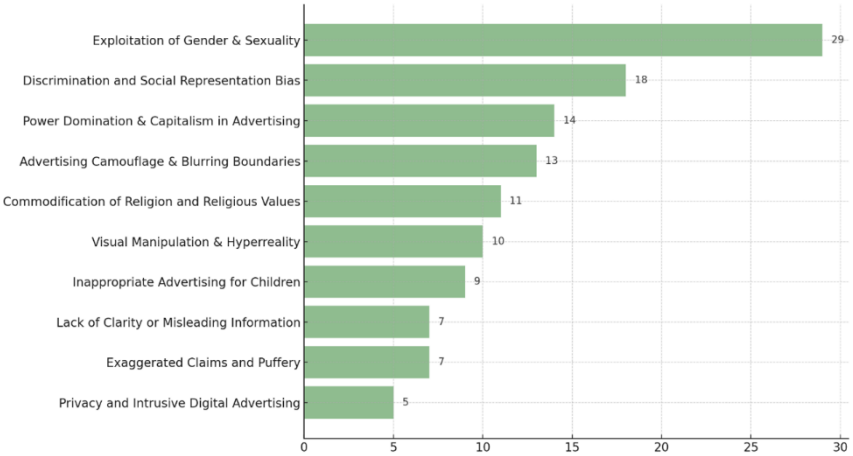


figure-3 Themes of Advertising Criticism in Indonesian Communication Scholarship

The most dominant theme concerns the exploitation of gender and sexuality, which appears in 29 articles. This theme includes studies that criticize the representation of women's bodies, sexualized visual display, gender stereotypes, and the use of femininity or masculinity as persuasive advertising devices. In these studies, advertising is often criticized for reproducing unequal gender relations and for reducing women or gendered identities to objects of visual attraction, consumption, or symbolic exchange.

The second major theme is discrimination and social representation bias, identified in 18 articles. This theme refers to studies that examine how advertising constructs unequal representations of class, ethnicity, race, body image, social status, or marginalized identities. These articles show that advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship is not limited to product promotion, but also addresses broader symbolic inequalities reproduced through media representation.

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The third theme is power domination and capitalism, found in 14 articles. These studies criticize advertising as part of a broader economic and ideological mechanism that promotes consumerism, commodifies social values, and normalizes capitalist forms of desire. Rather than treating advertisements as isolated promotional texts, these studies situate advertising within wider relations of power, market ideology, and consumer culture.

The fourth theme is advertising camouflage and blurred boundaries, identified in 13 articles. This theme includes studies on native advertising, embedded advertising, product placement, advertorial forms, and promotional content that appears similar to editorial, entertainment, or user-generated content. The central issue in this theme is the blurring of boundaries between information, entertainment, and persuasion.

The fifth theme is commodification of religion and religious values, appearing in 11 articles. These studies examine how religious symbols, Islamic identity, halal values, piety, and moral narratives are used as advertising resources. The criticism does not necessarily reject the presence of religion in advertising, but questions how religious meanings may be transformed into marketable signs, brand differentiation, or consumer persuasion.

The sixth theme is visual manipulation and hyperreality, identified in 10 articles. This theme includes studies that criticize exaggerated visual construction, idealized imagery, artificial beauty standards, and symbolic representations that may create unrealistic expectations. These articles show how advertising can construct realities that are aesthetically persuasive but socially problematic.

The seventh theme is inappropriate advertising for children, found in 9 articles. These studies focus on children as a vulnerable audience and criticize advertisements that may exploit children's limited knowledge of persuasion, encourage unhealthy consumption, or expose children to inappropriate persuasive appeals.

The eighth theme is lack of clarity or misleading information, identified in 7 articles. This theme refers to studies that criticize unclear claims, incomplete product information, ambiguous messages, or promotional statements that may mislead consumers. The issue here concerns the informational dimension of advertising and the expectation that advertising should communicate claims in a clear and accountable manner.

The ninth theme is exaggerated claims and puffery, also found in 7 articles. These studies examine promotional exaggeration, excessive superiority claims, and persuasive overstatement. Although puffery is often treated as a conventional advertising technique, these studies criticize how exaggeration may blur the boundary between persuasive creativity and misleading communication.

The final theme is privacy and intrusive digital advertising, identified in 5 articles. This theme reflects emerging concerns about data-driven advertising, digital tracking, algorithmic targeting, and intrusive promotional practices. Although this theme appears less frequently than gender or representation issues, it indicates a growing shift in Indonesian advertising criticism toward digital media environments.

Overall, the findings indicate that Indonesian communication scholarship has developed a broad range of advertising criticism. The dominant concerns remain related to gender representation, social inequality, capitalism, and religious commodification, while newer concerns such as digital intrusiveness and data-related advertising practices are beginning to emerge. This finding answers the first research question by showing that advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship is thematically diverse, but still concentrated around issues of representation, commodification, persuasion, and consumer vulnerability.

Research Question-2: Mapping Advertising Criticism Onto EPI Provisions

To answer the second research question, the dominant themes identified in the previous section were mapped onto relevant provisions of the 2020 Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI). This mapping does not assume that every reviewed article explicitly identified a formal EPI violation. Rather, it shows how the dominant themes of advertising criticism in Indonesian communication scholarship can be analytically related to the normative categories provided by EPI. Therefore, table-1 should be read as an interpretive mapping between academic criticism and advertising self-regulation, not as a legal or institutional adjudication of advertising violations.

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Table-1 Mapping Dominant Themes of Advertising Criticism onto EPI Provisions

No.	Dominant Theme	Freq.	Relevant Epi Provisions	Illustrative Key Articles
1	Exploitation of gender and sexuality	29	3.2 Perempuan; 3.3 Jender; 1.26 Pornografi dan Pornoaksi. EPI prohibits advertisements that demean, exploit, objectify, or ornament women, and also prohibits sexual exploitation in advertising.	Wicaksono (2012); Fernandez (2011); Yanti (2016); Widiastuti et al. (2023); Trijayanto (2017)
2	Discrimination and social representation bias	18	II.C Asas; 3.3 Jender; 3.8 Orang dengan kebutuhan khusus. EPI requires advertising to be honest, responsible, and to avoid demeaning religion, culture, the state, or social groups.	Mutahir et al. (2019); Trijayanto (2017); Yanti (2016)
3	Power domination and capitalism in advertising	14	II.A Mukadimah; II.C Asas. This theme is not always directly tied to a single EPI clause, but can be related to EPI's concern with consumer protection, clear information, and responsible advertising.	Mutahir et al. (2019); Wicaksono (2012); Yanti (2016)
4	Advertising camouflage and blurring boundaries	13	2.29 Iklan Tersisip, Terlebur, Sesuai Pesanan; 2.30 Iklan Penggoda; 2.31 Iklan Waktu Blokiran; 4.13 Periklanan Informatif. EPI requires advertising to be identifiable and not hidden or disguised as other types of content.	Dinanti & Hadi (2021); Pasandaran (2018); Adila et al. (2023)
5	Commodification of religion and religious values	11	1.7 Agama dan Budaya; 2.27 Agama; 3.5 Tokoh Agama; 1.2.3 Halal. EPI prohibits exploitation of religious rituals and symbols and regulates the use of halal claims.	El Ghiffary & Widana (2023); Mandjusri (2017); Karimah et al. (2019); Arbak et al. (2019)
6	Visual manipulation and hyperreality	10	1.12 Hiperbol; 2.7 Kosmetika dan Produk Perawatan Tubuh; 4.2 Media Televisi. EPI allows hyperbole only when clearly excessive and not misleading, while also regulating manipulated product appearances.	Fernandez (2011); Widiastuti et al. (2023)
7	Inappropriate advertising for children	9	1.29 Khalayak Anak; 3.1 Anak; 2.4 Produk Pangan. EPI regulates advertisements targeting children, including clarity, vulnerability, pester power, unsafe behavior, and inappropriate use of children as advertising actors.	Astuti (2017)
8	Lack of clarity or misleading information	7	1.2 Bahasa; 1.3 Tanda Asteris; 1.25 Syarat dan Ketentuan; 1.27 Manfaat Produk. EPI requires advertising language to be understandable and not misleading, and product benefits to be communicated honestly and responsibly.	Azwar & Junaedi (2019)
9	Exaggerated claims and puffery	7	1.2 Bahasa; 1.12 Hiperbol; 1.27 Manfaat Produk. EPI restricts unsupported superlative claims and allows hyperbole only when it is clearly recognizable and does not create misperceptions.	Azwar & Junaedi (2019)
10	Privacy and intrusive digital advertising	5	1.11 Perlindungan Hak-Hak Pribadi; 4.6 Media Daring; 4.7 SMS/MMS; 4.10 Perusahaan Basis Data. EPI regulates personal rights, cookies, consent to the use of personal data, e-mail advertising, SMS advertising, and database use.	Adila et al. (2023)

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The mapping shows that several dominant themes of advertising criticism are strongly aligned with explicit EPI provisions. Gender and sexuality, children, religion, misleading information, hyperbole, embedded advertising, and digital privacy can be directly related to specific clauses in the EPI. This indicates that EPI provides a sufficiently broad normative vocabulary for addressing many of the ethical concerns discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship.

However, not all themes are equally codified in EPI. Themes such as power domination, capitalism, consumerism, and the social construction of reality tend to operate at a broader theoretical level. These themes criticize advertising as part of a wider system of market ideology, consumer culture, symbolic domination, or social inequality. They can be related to EPI's general principles of responsible advertising and consumer protection, but they are not always reducible to one specific clause.

This distinction is important for interpreting the findings. The reviewed articles do not merely identify rule violations; they also observe advertising as a cultural, ideological, and symbolic practice. Therefore, EPI functions in this study as a normative mapping framework, while the articles themselves often use broader theoretical lenses such as semiotics, gender studies, cultural studies, political economy, and media sociology.

Overall, the answer to the second research question is that the dominant themes of advertising criticism can be mapped onto several EPI provisions, especially those concerning gender, women, religion and culture, children, language, product claims, hyperbole, embedded advertising, digital media, privacy, and database practices. At the same time, the mapping also reveals that some academic criticisms exceed the clause-based structure of EPI and require broader theoretical interpretation.

Research Question-3: Visibility and Operationalization of EPI in Indonesian Advertising Scholarship

To answer the third research question, the review examined the extent to which the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI) was explicitly referenced and operationalized as an analytical framework in the reviewed articles. This analysis differs from the preceding mapping. While Research Question 2 examined how dominant themes of advertising criticism can be analytically related to EPI provisions, this section focuses on whether the articles themselves explicitly mention, use, or operationalize EPI.

The findings show that EPI appears unevenly in Indonesian advertising scholarship. Based on the extraction process, the reviewed articles can be grouped into four levels of EPI visibility: articles that explicitly mention EPI and identify relevant provisions, articles that discuss advertising ethics without specifying EPI provisions, and articles that do not mention EPI but can be analytically related to EPI provisions, and articles that discuss broader advertising criticism without sufficient basis for article-level EPI classification. This classification is presented in table-2.

table-2 Levels of EPI Visibility in the Final Article Corpus

LEVEL OF EPI VISIBILITY	OPERATIONAL DEFINITION	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	INTERPRETATION
Explicit EPI operationalization	Articles explicitly mention EPI and identify relevant EPI provisions or clauses in their analysis	6	EPI is used as an explicit analytical reference
Ethical discussion without EPI provisions	Articles discuss advertising ethics or ethical violations, but do not specify EPI provisions	21	Ethics is visible, but EPI is not systematically operationalized
Analytical relevance to EPI	Articles do not explicitly mention EPI, but their themes can be analytically related to EPI provisions	83	EPI is absent as a cited framework, but relevant as a mapping reference
Broader advertising criticism without identifiable EPI visibility	Articles discuss advertising criticism, representation, persuasion, or media culture, but do not provide sufficient basis for article-level EPI classification	13	Included in the final corpus, but EPI is not visible at the article level
Total final article corpus		**123**	

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The findings show that EPI appears unevenly in the final corpus of 123 articles. Six articles explicitly mention EPI and identify relevant provisions, while 21 articles discuss advertising ethics without specifying EPI provisions. A larger group of 83 articles does not explicitly mention EPI but can be analytically related to EPI provisions based on their dominant themes. The remaining 13 articles are still part of the final corpus because they discuss advertising criticism, representation, persuasion, or media culture, but they do not provide sufficient basis for article-level classification of EPI visibility.

Therefore, EPI is not entirely absent from Indonesian advertising scholarship. However, its explicit and systematic operationalization remains limited. The findings indicate that EPI is more often present as an implicit or potential normative reference than as a clearly cited and operationalized analytical framework.

Discussion

This section provides a critical and theoretical interpretation of the empirical findings using Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory. The high frequency of the ten dominant themes of advertising criticism suggests that ethical issues in Indonesian advertising scholarship should not be understood merely as isolated cases, historical accidents, or individual moral failings. Rather, they can be interpreted as recurring communicative patterns through which advertising is observed, criticized, and normatively evaluated within Indonesian communication studies (Luhmann, 1995).

Luhmann (1995; 2013) argues that contemporary society is functionally differentiated into operationally closed and autopoietic social systems, each reproducing itself through its own communicative operations. From this perspective, law, ethics, academia, and advertising do not necessarily process the same issue through the same logic. While legal and ethical communication tend to formulate expectations in terms of compliance, violation, responsibility, and normativity, advertising communication is strongly oriented toward persuasive visibility, attention, memorability, and effectiveness. Therefore, the recurring themes identified in this review should not be read simply as evidence that advertising actors deliberately reject ethical norms. Rather, they indicate that ethical expectations require communicative translation before they can become meaningful within advertising, academic, or regulatory communication.

This interpretation is consistent with advertising and marketing communication literature that has long criticized gender bias, visual manipulation, cultural stereotyping, puffery, religious commodification, and advertising directed at children. Belch & Belch (2021) and Clow & Baack (2022), for example, emphasize that advertising strategies can reproduce gender bias, unrealistic representations, and persuasive distortions. Similarly, Moriarty et al. (2019) and Andrews & Shimp (2018) show that cultural stereotyping, exaggerated claims, and child-targeted persuasion raise ethical concerns because they may reproduce symbolic inequality, exploit vulnerable audiences, or blur the boundary between creative persuasion and misleading communication. From a Luhmannian perspective, these concerns become sociologically significant not because advertising is outside ethics, but because ethical critique must be reconstructed within the communicative logic of advertising before it can affect advertising practices.

The challenge becomes more complex in the context of digital transformation. The integration of big data analytics, algorithms, and artificial intelligence (AI) in advertising intensifies the speed, personalization, and opacity of persuasive communication (Gao et al., 2023; Darmawan & Perdana, 2026). The use of chatbots based on large language models (LLMs) to insert unlabeled advertising content (Vukmirović et al., 2025), together with real-time data tracking and algorithmic targeting, produces new problems of privacy, transparency, consent, and accountability (Chuan et al., 2023; Judijanto et al., 2025; Singhal, 2024). These developments do not make ethical regulation impossible, but they complicate the translation of ethical norms into the operational mechanisms of digital advertising. As Perdana (2022) suggests, regulatory and ethical frameworks face difficulties when digital advertising practices operate through technical infrastructures that are not easily visible to users, regulators, or even researchers.

In this context, the empirical finding that EPI has been explicitly and systematically operationalized only in a limited number of studies should not be interpreted as the absolute failure of structural coupling between law, academia, and advertising. A more precise interpretation is that the relationship between EPI and Indonesian advertising scholarship demonstrates limited resonance. EPI exists as a professional self-regulatory framework, and the 2020 document defines it as normative provisions concerning the advertising profession and business that are agreed upon for observance, compliance, and enforcement by its supporting associations and institutions. EPI also states that advertising ethics are grounded in the principle of self-regulation, where ethical norms are more effective when formulated, agreed upon, and enforced by advertising

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actors themselves. However, the findings of this review show that this self-regulatory framework has not yet become a dominant analytical vocabulary in Indonesian communication scholarship.

The role of this study, therefore, is not to claim that EPI is merely symbolic or that advertising ethics have completely failed. Instead, the contribution of this study is to show how EPI appears unevenly across academic communication: explicitly in a small number of studies, implicitly in studies that discuss advertising ethics without specifying EPI provisions, and analytically in studies whose themes can be mapped onto EPI even though they do not cite it directly. This is where Luhmann's concept of second-order observation becomes theoretically useful (Luhmann, 2000; 2013). The reviewed articles function as first-order academic observations of advertising, while this SLR observes how those studies observe advertising ethics, self-regulation, and EPI.

Accordingly, the theoretical contribution of this study lies in reframing the marginal use of EPI not as simple ignorance or total regulatory failure, but as a problem of limited communicative translation between professional self-regulation, academic observation, and advertising practice. To strengthen EPI's relevance, future research needs to use it not only as a normative background but also as a systematic analytical framework. This would allow scholars, legal researchers, sociologists, advertising practitioners, and the public to translate ethical expectations into categories that can be recognized within academic research, professional evaluation, and industry practice.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how criticism of advertising has been discussed in Indonesian communication scholarship and how these critiques can be mapped onto the Indonesian Advertising Ethics (Etika Pariwara Indonesia/EPI). Based on a systematic literature review of 123 journal articles published between 2004 and 2023, the findings show that advertising criticism in Indonesia is concentrated in ten dominant themes: gender and sexuality, discrimination and social representation bias, power domination and capitalism, advertising camouflage, religious commodification, visual manipulation, child-targeted advertising, misleading information, exaggerated claims, and intrusive digital advertising.

These themes can be mapped onto several provisions of the 2020 EPI, particularly those concerning women, gender, pornography and pornoaction, religion and culture, halal claims, children, misleading language, product benefits, hyperbole, embedded advertising, digital media, privacy, and database practices. However, the mapping also shows that not all academic criticisms are reducible to specific EPI clauses. Themes such as capitalism, consumerism, domination, and social construction require broader theoretical interpretation because they address advertising as part of wider cultural, ideological, and economic processes.

The study also shows that EPI has been explicitly and systematically operationalized only to a limited extent in Indonesian advertising scholarship. EPI is not entirely absent, but its presence is uneven: it appears explicitly in a small number of studies, implicitly in studies discussing advertising ethics, and analytically in studies whose themes can be related to EPI without directly citing it. Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory, this pattern is interpreted as limited resonance between professional self-regulation and academic observation, rather than as individual ignorance, moral failure, or the total failure of advertising ethics (Luhmann, 1995; 2000; 2013).

A limitation of this study is that it analyzes academic articles, not direct advertising industry practice. Therefore, the findings should be read as a reflection of how Indonesian communication scholarship observes advertising ethics, not as a direct measurement of EPI compliance in the industry. Future research should examine how EPI is understood and used by advertising practitioners, regulators, educators, and audiences, particularly in digital advertising, influencer marketing, native advertising, algorithmic targeting, and AI-mediated persuasion.

DECLARATIONS

Author contributions

Inco Hary Perdana: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Writing–Original Draft; Helga Liliani Cakra Dewi: Methodology, Validation, Writing–Review & Editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available journal articles indexed in the SINTA database. The extracted dataset analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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