



# Concentrated, Corporate, and Camouflaged: The Nature of AI News Coverage in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** The adaptation of artificial technology in society requires a healthy public discourse. This necessitates nuanced and diverse views provided by mainstream media. However, there has not been empirical understanding of editorial practice towards AI in Indonesia, and whether news outlets have cited balanced voices. Drawing from a similar study in the United Kingdom, this paper seeks to identify the primary news sources and topics on the coverage of AI in Indonesian media outlets. This paper analysed 777 news articles from January to June 2024, published by five major news sites namely Liputan6.com, Detik.com, Kompas.com, tvonenews.com, and Tempo.co. This paper found that of 1025 news sources, people representing the business sector dominated the conversation (55.6%), far beyond government (16.39%) and academics (13%). We also found that of 777 published articles, more than half discussed the AI industry itself (58.9%), compared to AI impact on society and labour (23.5%), and misuse and regulation (16.2%). We conclude that these media outlets have failed to provide varied viewpoints for the public, paving avenues for asymmetrical business-led debate, and allowing promotional messaging to camouflage as journalism reports.

**Keywords:** Editorial mapping; news source; promotional journalism; Indonesian media; artificial intelligence.

## Article History

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## 1. Introduction

News coverage is vital to public debates, as it facilitates monitoring, holding power to account, and maintaining deliberation (Fenton, 2010). A functioning debate requires diversity of opinions being represented in news media, according to which the public can engage and make informed decisions (Just, 2009; Masini *et al.*, 2017). News coverage about AI is no exception. In fact, news is shaping public awareness and trust of new technology, which are central for its adoption and usage (Sartori & Theodoru, 2022).

AI has been on the news for at least four decades, but it has become more intensive since 2015 (Sun *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, news about AI has nearly quadrupled from 2010 to 2015 and written longer (Nguyen & Hekman, 2024). With a handful exceptions, most of the existing studies on AI were conducted in the Global North, with the main commonalities of narratives and sources.

Studies on narrative have found that news on AI are deeply polarised, either focusing on utopian solutions like a workless future, or dystopian threat that will undermine humanity (Chubb *et al.*, 2022). Regardless, news coverage is expected to be fair, where all

important views are presented; while also accurate, where facts are published with context (Kern, 2008). Despite some news emphasising risks or limitations of AI have been present, news that focus on benefits of AI appeared more frequently (Sun *et al.*, 2020). In Canada, for example, AI is frequently written from a business lens, and when it is published as tech news, they tend to be techno-optimistic and in glorious terms (Dandurand *et al.*, 2022). AI is also imagined in a much more positive light, despite anxiety towards the technology that may stem from popular culture like television series and films (Wang *et al.*, 2023). While in the United Kingdom, news about industry products and announcements accounted for nearly 60% of news articles. Media constantly asserts AI potential as a solution to various public problems, often without balancing it with discussion on its effects (Brennen *et al.*, 2018).

Commonalities also present when it comes to news sources. Masini *et al.* (2017) argues that, at an article level, presenting several types of actors and/or multiple viewpoints ensures journalism diversity. However, news on AI has been heavily influenced by only 3 main players, namely business, government, and research sectors, while citizens and critical voices were largely non-existent (Sun *et al.*, 2020). In the UK, media quoted industry players more than anyone else (33%), almost twice from academia, and six times from government (Brennen *et al.*, 2018). Similarly in the US, American newspapers overwhelmingly cited business sources (64.7%), followed by scientists (29.1%), and non-science experts (23.6%). Another study found that in 2009-2012, science and research institutions were cited more frequently, and it has changed in 2015 to government and politicians (Chuan *et al.*, 2019).

While various studies have revealed the ubiquity of business sources in AI news, there has not been similar assessment in Indonesia. This examination has been increasingly more important, given increased attention towards this technology. The Indonesian government seems to be paying quite a lot of attention to this technology. In the past few months, the then-President Joko Widodo has met with the CEO of Microsoft and the CEO of Apple. They discussed investment plans and the construction of data centres in Indonesia (Tarigan, 2024). Similarly, a number of government officials, mainly from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, have discussed the application of AI on a number of occasions (Sutrisno, 2024).

This paper is particularly concerned with the news sources. Phillips (2015) argues that relationships between journalists and sources, added with prioritisation of information, shape news for their audiences. Furthermore, she argues that news sources are reflective of existing power structures, and linked to what we called as 'primary definers', who frame what the problem is (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 59). Journalists should be also aware of the source's motive, as they may aim to influence events, stop something from happening, or have some questionable motives (Rusbridger, 2020). Thus, this paper aims to answers the following questions: What type of news sources led the narrative of AI news in Indonesia? What are the topics being discussed in AI news in Indonesia?

## 2. Methods

This paper mixes quantitative and qualitative approaches. To identify the main actors that led the narrative in Indonesia, this paper sought all unique news sources from 777 news articles published between January 1-June 30, 2024. The corpus was populated from 5 leading online outlets, namely Liputan6.com, Detik.com, Kompas.com, tvOnenews.com, and Tempo.co. These free-to-access outlets were curated to represent wide reach but different media ownerships, political stances, and readers demographics.

All articles were traced using keywords of ‘artificial intelligence’, ‘AI’, and its Indonesian terms ‘*kecerdasan buatan*’ and ‘*kecerdasan artificial*’. The database was built with no automated crawling involved. Table 1 shows a total of articles according to each news site, sorted from the biggest.

Table 1. The amount of news per outlets

No	News site	Articles
1	Liputan6.com	309
2	Detik.com	258
3	Kompas.com	157
4	tvOneNews.com	30
5	Tempo.co	23
Total		777

The list was then cleaned, systematically analysed, and manually coded by the authors. This paper slightly modified source types from Brennen *et al.* (2018) and categorised all sources into (1) business or industry, (2) academics or research, (3) CSO or advocacy groups, (4) government or multinational bodies, and (5) people or public. We then examined recurring themes frequently highlighted by these articles. To complement our quantitative analysis, we also conducted a semi-structured interview to a source. It was a CSO member consistently wrote for Detik.com. This interview was chosen to understand the editorial process behind publishing opinion pieces.

### 3. Results and discussions

#### 3.1. News sources

From systematic analysis of the corpus, we found a total of 1025 news sources being quoted or referred to. Business actors or entities dominate more than half of all sources (570). Government, politicians, and multinational bodies came second (168), closely followed by academics, experts, or research sectors (134). Fourth place was the public, internet users, or others (110); while advocacy groups, CSOs and NGOs came last (43).

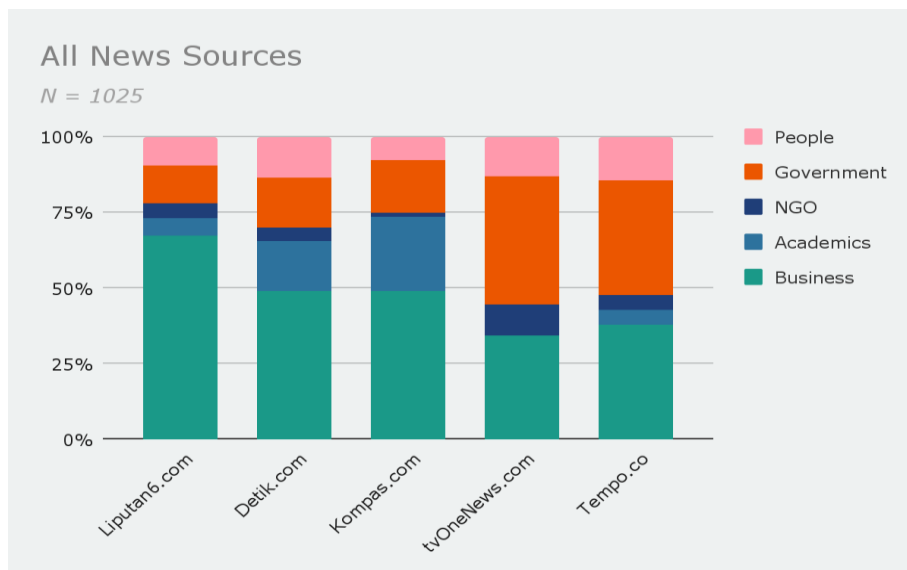


Figure 1. News sources, sorted per news outlets and types

Of all media outlets examined, business people are consistently the main actors (36%-67%). These are especially high for Liputan6.com (67.1%) (Figure 2), followed by Kompas.com and Detik.com (both 48.9%). Both outlets also referred to people from the government in around similar percentages (16-17%) (Figure 3 and 4).

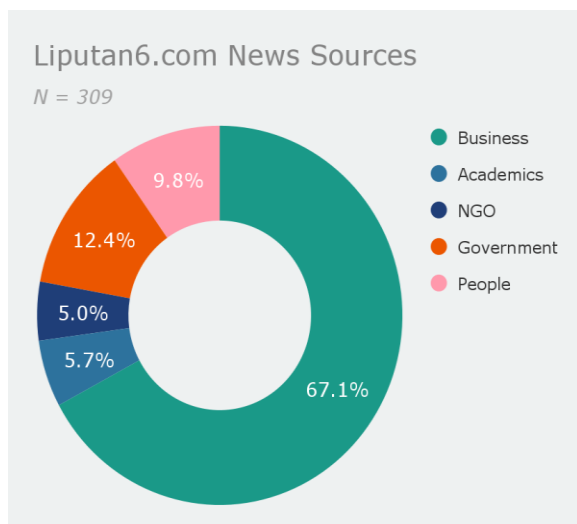


Figure 2. News sources on Liputan6.com

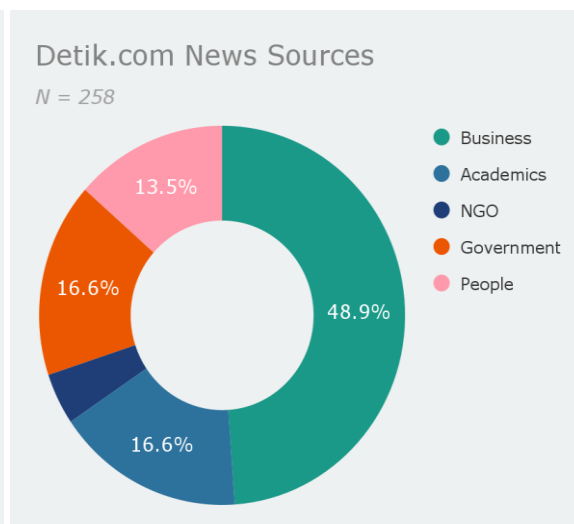


Figure 3. News sources on Detik.com

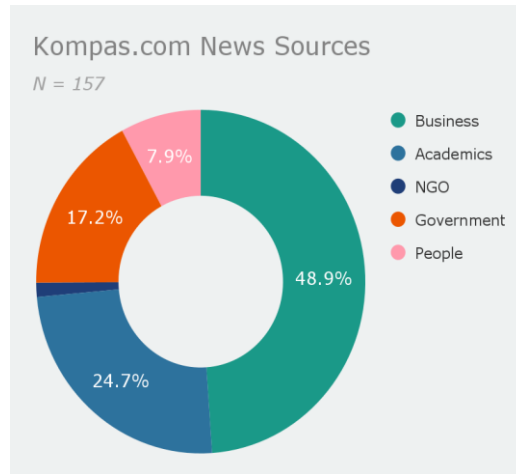


Figure 4. News sources on Kompas.com

Meanwhile, sources from the government were most present on tvOneNews.com (41%), making it the only outlet where this sector, despite slightly, outnumbers business (38%). Tempo.co, on the other hand, quoted an exact same percentage of government and business sector (both 38%) (Figure 5 and 6).

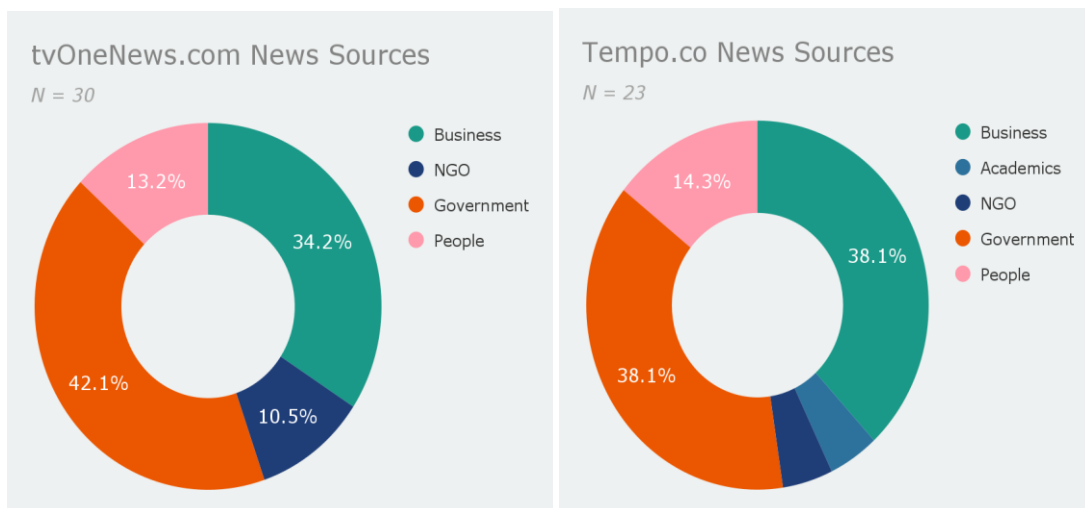


Figure 5. News sources on tvOneNews.com. Figure 6. News sources on Tempo.co

Contrasting results can be found on the number of academics or experts. Kompas.com came in with the most number (56 times) and percentage (25%), followed by Detik.com with (17%). On the contrary, tvOneNews.com had not quoted a single academic or expert within the research duration of this paper. However, despite considerable numbers of academics and experts on Kompas.com, it is worth noting that they were cited not in news articles, but in opinion pieces authored by university professors, experts, and university students themselves. Furthermore, from 18 opinion pieces published on Kompas.com, 11 were written by only one law professor from University of Padjadjaran. This implies that concentration of voices still pretty much present.

Similar situation was also identified for CSO or advocacy groups. Detik.com quoted most members of advocacy groups (14 times), yet it largely came from opinion pieces, not news articles. From 11 opinion pieces published, 5 were written by individuals from an

Indonesian CSO ‘ICT Watch’, attending a forum of ‘AI For Good Global Summit 2024’ in Geneva. This again does not substitute a diversity of opinions.

In our interview with Donny Utoyo of ICT Watch, he said he wrote for Detik.com because he has a direct connection to Detik’s deputy editor. Detik gave him and his team full freedom in writing, as long as it is not promoting something. Donny said, “Of course, what we offered at that time was not AI in the context, there were new apps, new features, etc. But more on the elements of policy, ethics, and governance” (Interview, Aug 5, 2024). He also believed that the voice from the CSO sector is underrepresented. He agreed that the private sector is pretty well-interviewed since it has access to more resources, as well as sources from the government and academics.

While CSOs that are mostly active at the grassroots level, who understand more about the conditions of society in general, certainly do not have the same resources, competencies and chances as other stakeholders do. That’s why the voice of CSOs needs to be continuously strengthened, in the context of multi-stakeholder collaboration domestically and cooperation between CSOs in the Global South. (Interview, Aug 5, 2024)

Meanwhile, sources from people, internet users, or others were quoted around 13-14% on Detik.com, Tempo.co and tvOneNews.com. Some of these were practitioners from creative and media industries being impacted by AI, some were internet users quoted as tweets or internet posts when illustrating controversies and dis/misinformation.

We also found that a majority of articles (60%) were published with a single source, usually from the business sector. This is especially overwhelming for tvOneNews.com that published 80% of all articles with one voice. While other news outlets share lower numbers, but still constitute around half of the published contents, with Detik.com (66%), Tempo.co (50%), and Kompas.com (48%) (Figure 7).

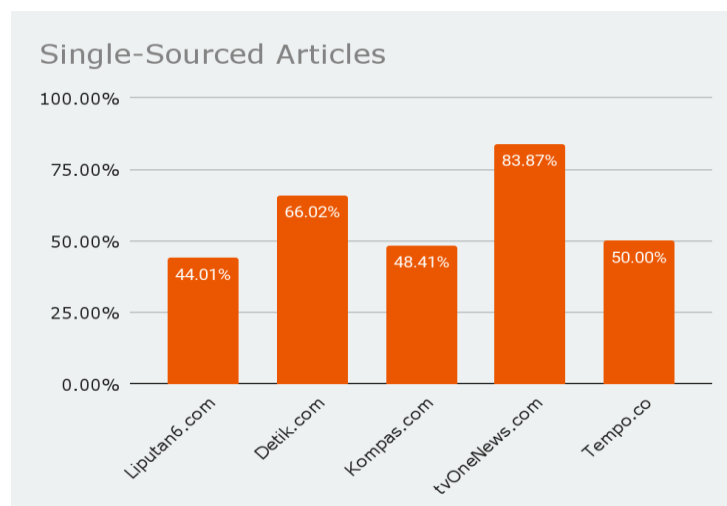


Figure 7. The percentage of single-sourced news articles

### 3.2. News topics

The influence of the business sector is strongly manifested in what kind of contents were created and published. In fact, this paper found that of 777 news published, 58.9% of all contents discussed the AI industry itself – from innovation, product, deals, investment, to business executives. This is pretty dominant compared to other topics such as AI impacts on society or labour (23.5%) and stories about AI misuse and regulation (16.2%).

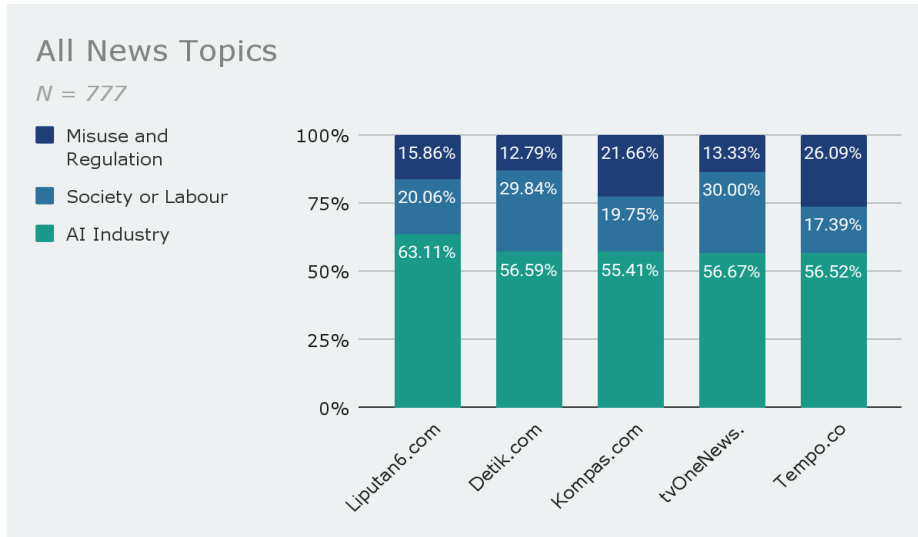


Figure 8. News topics, sorted per news outlets

News about the AI industry substitutes more than 55% articles across all media outlets examined. Liputan6.com is particularly high with more than 63% (Figure 9). A slight difference was found on regulation, where Kompas.com and Tempo.co both produce more stories about AI regulation, than AI impact on society (Figure 12 and 13).

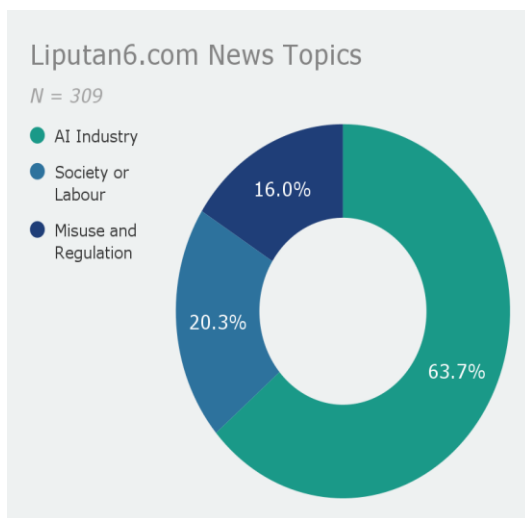


Figure 9. News topics on Liputan6.com

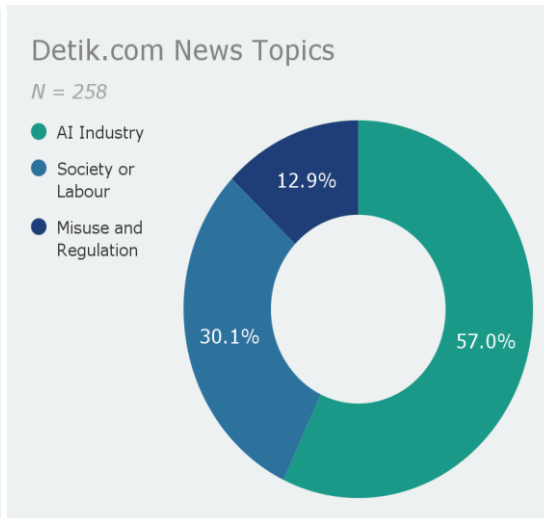


Figure 10. News topics on Detik.com

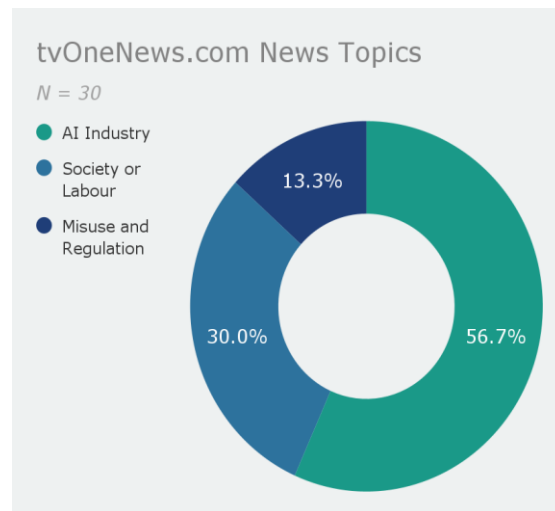


Figure 11. News topics on tvOneNews.com

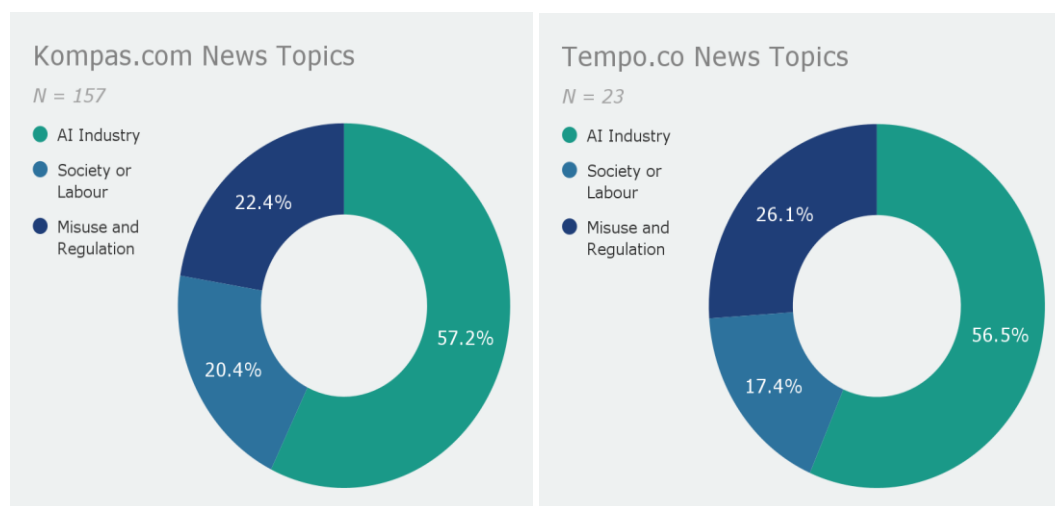


Figure 12. News topics on Kompas.com

Figure 13. News topics on Tempo.co

Out of 700 articles, 9 of them were clearly labelled as paid content. However, it does not guarantee pure journalistic work and commercial messaging are clearly demarcated. This paper found a great number of articles covering the launch of new products and explained new features by citing solely company sources. Evidence on this can be found in articles published by different outlets but writing the exact same thing. For example, both Liputan6.com and Detik.com published this same quote: “We have adopted and utilised many of Microsoft’s latest technologies, such as Generative AI from Microsoft Azure, which we implemented for the further development of the Sabrina chatbot.” On Liputan6.com, this quotation was found in article titled “Partnering with Microsoft, BRI Strengthens the Use of AI to Serve Customer Needs”, while on Detik.com it was found in article titled “Improve AI, BRI Partners with Microsoft for More Advanced Services.”

### 3.3. Business-concentrated

This paper found that business actors and industry players were the main sources for AI news in Indonesia. Our data reveals that sources from this sector were quoted or referred to



3.3 times more than the government, and 4.2 times more than academic/experts. This paper shares strong similarities with studies in the American newspapers (Sun *et al.*, 2020) and the British news outlets (Brennen *et al.*, 2018). Given 60% of contents published were single-sourced, this allowed the business sector to lead the narrative without being confronted or questioned. It can be said that corporate sources have become what Hall *et al.* (1978) called 'primary definers', where their language and lens are used to describe AI in news.

Kern (2008) argues that a reporting will be more credible should it provide a spectrum of viewpoints. In some articles we examined, despite quoting two or even three sources, all of them came from the corporate background, indicating a false balance. By doing this, Indonesian news outlets have failed to take account of different cultural views that will allow a reader to get a broader understanding of an issue (Rusbridger, 2020; Masini *et al.*, 2017). Publishing single-sourced stories also contradicts news outlets' role as gatekeepers. News outlets have failed to provide what Phillips (2015) called space for secondary voices that allow 'oppositional' reading to creep in. Rusbridger (2020) maintains, despite various factors, the classic benchmark for quoting is two sources, because it increases the probability of getting something right.

### **3.4. Corporate reliance**

We found indication of journalists' reliance on corporate press releases about AI and having an advertorial tendency. Our examination revealed many of these articles promoted newly launched products voluntarily. These news outlets were not necessarily paid, but published releases without a proper balancing process. This is what O'Neill and O'Connor (2008) imply as passive journalists, in which journalists merely amplify bland copy, in this case from industry players to the audience. They also argue that journalists are becoming less of an active investigator and simply passing on what is provided to them by, usually, public relation professionals.

Koch *et al.* (2017) found that journalists are likely to underestimate public relations influence, seeing their work as more independent, while public relations professionals overestimate their influence and believe more strongly that their work benefits journalists. However, commercial influence is more likely to affect journalists in precarious working conditions. This is a probable case in Indonesia, where journalists are pressured to craft a certain quantity of articles daily (Adiprasetyo & Wibowo, 2020).

### **3.5. Camouflaged message**

Our analysis suggests that various commercial messages about AI have emerged as pure journalistic articles. Statements or press conferences about AI with promotional nature were quoted without nuance. This is different from sponsored editorial content or blurring distinction between paid content and editorial content (Hardy, 2021; Juntunen, 2022).

This paper found quotes from the business sector were presented as isolated facts, hence their intended marketing purposes were concealed. We believe that media coverage is in close proximity with the industry, and sometimes becomes the extension of their interests. This confirms various studies that found news about AI tend to use the lens of, and reflect, the business sector (Dandurand *et al.*, 2022; Brennen *et al.*, 2018). Promotional messaging written as journalistic articles is harder for readers to recognise, as it suggests to readers that those were constrained by journalist's commitment to objectivity, impartiality, and

truthfulness (Kats *et al.*, 2021; Franklin & Canter, 2019). This in turn makes commercial content and journalism writings indistinguishable and flaw the plurality of public debates.

#### 4. Conclusion

Departing from the data, our analysis affirmed that Indonesian news outlets have put business sources (55.6%) in a central position of AI news. Meanwhile, voices from academia (13%), advocacy (4.2%), government (16.39%), and the public (10.7%) remain largely peripheral. Given most articles were also single-sourced, this paves a way for the industry players to dictate public conversation without proper inquiry.

Business influence is fully pronounced in the topics. We found a centralised discussion around the AI industry (58.9%), that eclipses articles about AI impact in society and labour (23.5%), as well as AI misuse and regulation (16.2%). Our analysis suggests that there is an undeniable reliance from journalists to corporate press releases; without proper journalism scrutiny, the news outlets published news articles with a marketing nature.

To sum up, news coverage about AI in Indonesia is characterised by concentrated voices in the hands of the business sector, reliance towards corporate release, and promotional messages camouflaged as journalism articles. News outlets have failed to demonstrate robust editorial practice as well as provide diverse competing voices. Instead, the outlets have provided asymmetrical public debate that has closer proximity to business interest.

This paper has several limitations that could be further explored by other scholars. It did not provide a deeper analysis about whether AI is discussed in positive or negative light, no matter from business, society, or regulation lens. It also lacks a narrative analysis that can provide a more nuanced understanding of the public perception about AI. Future studies may apply discourse analysis to reveal layered understandings of how AI is being debated. Additionally, future research may conduct more interviews with journalists and editors involved in the editorial decision-making process.

Our study serves as a call for media professionals to amplify their efforts in reaching out to diverse voices in the society. This is especially true for sources from civil society groups and advocacy organizations. It is important to remember that journalists should not serve only a segment of the public. In addition to that, journalists should be reminded to restore scepticism in their journalistic processes, either when dealing with business or with any sectors.

#### Notes on Contributors

**Rio Tuasikal** Rio brings a decade of experience as a broadcast journalist to Voice of America (VOA) in Washington, DC, where he handles international news, US foreign policy, American politics, and climate for Indonesian audience. Previously Rio had worked with Pulitzer Center, BBC World Service, the Gecko Project, and many more, cultivating editorial and digital skills in Jakarta, London, and Washington. He obtained an MA from Goldsmiths, University of London, where he studied the connection between society, tech, and capitalism. He also earned a diploma in Visual Journalism from Ateneo de Manila University where he practiced videography, photo essays, and critical visual literacy. rtuas001@gold.ac.uk (Primary Contact)

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