

Not Afraid of AI yet: Indonesian TV Journalists on Negotiating Roles in AI-Assisted Newsrooms

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Abstract

The introduction of Indonesia’s first AI-generated news presenter by tvOne in 2023 marked a symbolic moment in the country’s experimentation with AI in television journalism. While AI adoption has sparked global debates about automation and the future of journalistic labor, less is known about how journalists themselves interpret these technologies, particularly in Global South media environments. This study examines how Indonesian television journalists make sense of AI in newsroom practices through the lens of journalistic role perceptions. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 20 television journalists from 12 national newsrooms, the findings indicate that journalists largely perceive AI as a supplementary tool to assist routine production tasks rather than replace core journalistic functions. Participants purported that video capture, editorial judgment, contextual interpretation, and verification remain irreplaceably human responsibilities in television news. These interpretations reflect the continued importance of established journalistic roles, particularly information dissemination and accountability, in shaping television journalists’ responses to technological innovation. Simultaneously, journalists’ views are embedded within broader structural conditions, including economic pressures and newsroom restructuring in Indonesia’s television industry. This study demonstrates how journalists negotiate AI adoption by balancing professional values with the changing economic realities of television news production.

Keywords

artificial intelligence; Indonesian news media; journalistic role; news presenters; television journalists; visual journalism

1. Introduction

On 21 April 2023, Karni Ilyas, a senior Indonesian television journalist and news presenter, appeared on a national tvOne news program—not in person, but as an avatar generated by AI. The network subsequently developed three virtual presenters modelled on human anchors (Ikhwan & Prihatmadi, 2025). The launch of these AI-based virtual presenters followed a global trend in automated broadcasting, notably pioneered by Xinhua News Agency, which introduced an AI news anchor in November 2018 (Baraniuk, 2018; Kothari & Cruikshank, 2022).

Although tvOne framed its virtual news presenters as an experimental initiative, their debut raised broader questions about the implications of AI for journalistic labor and professional identity: How does AI's integration into newsroom workflows, particularly in broadcast journalism, reshape journalists' perceptions of their professional future? Does AI deployment primarily augment existing capacities, or does it signal deeper structural reconfiguration of the profession? These questions are topical globally but have additional pertinence and nuances in the Global South, as is exemplified by the context of Indonesia, one of Southeast Asia's largest and most dynamic media markets.

In this study, Global South refers not only to a geographic category, but also to media environments shaped by unequal technological resources, economic pressures, and dependence on technologies largely developed in the Global North (Munoriyarwa, 2024; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). This perspective is important because journalists in countries such as Indonesia negotiate AI adoption within distinct institutional and labor conditions that differ from those commonly examined in Western-centric scholarship.

In this context, AI news presenters' emergence might be interpreted as evidence that Indonesian journalism, especially broadcast journalism, could adapt to rapid technological change (Karunianingsih et al., 2025). The initiative could be viewed as positioning Indonesian television news within a global trajectory of digital innovation, demonstrating openness to experimentation and technological optimization. In increasingly competitive, fragmented media environments, technological integration might also help news organizations to maintain relevance and boost audience engagement (Chalikiopoulou et al., 2025; Jordaan, 2025). Yet, AI integration into journalistic practice does not unfold in a linear or uniform manner. Despite high-profile experiments such as tvOne's AI news anchors, many Indonesian newsrooms lack the financial, technological, and human resources required for systematic AI adoption (Manan, 2024).

Such structural disparities are particularly evident when comparing media systems globally. Much existing literature focuses on highly resourced news organizations in the Global North, where financial capital, technological infrastructure, and specialized expertise enable sustained experimentation with advanced technologies (Mauran, 2024; News Corp, 2024; The Guardian, 2025). By contrast, media organizations in the Global South operate under substantially different conditions (Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). These news organizations generally experience greater problems of limited budgets, volatile advertising markets, and constrained technological infrastructures, which can restrict their capacity to explore or implement emerging technologies at scale (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Jamil, 2021).

Beyond structural conditions, another crucial dimension concerns how journalists interpret AI's infiltration into their everyday work. Journalists' responses to technological change are closely tied to their professional

role perceptions (Kuai, 2026), which shape their understanding of “good journalism” practices (S. Wu, 2026). This issue is particularly salient in television journalism, where visual presence, credibility, and performative authority have traditionally been central to professional identity (Deavours & Roberts, 2025).

Although AI may open new avenues for newsroom innovation (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026), workforce downsizing and heightened efficiency demands have intensified concerns that AI could be deployed primarily as a cost-constraint mechanism rather than a supportive tool. In this context, AI becomes both a technological advancement and a symbolic marker of broader transformations affecting journalistic labor and the profession’s future. Indeed, issues raised by AI expansion in television newsrooms resonate with wider debates about the role of AI in human labor that have emerged across many fields. Some scholars view AI as a potential substitute for human work through automation (Dahlin, 2024), while others argue that AI functions more as a creative enhancer that augments human capabilities (Chow & Celis Bueno, 2025; Erickson, 2024; Hemraj, 2026). In journalism, these debates center on whether AI threatens professional autonomy and human creativity or instead supports efficiency and innovation (Kuai & Thomson, 2025; Lewis et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, this article examines how Indonesian television journalists interpret the emergence of AI within their professional environment and how these interpretations intersect with professional role perceptions.

2. AI Adoption, Journalistic Identity, and Industry Volatility

2.1. Mapping the Field: Current State of AI and Journalism Research

As technological transformation accelerates, journalism scholars have increasingly examined how AI reshapes the journalistic landscape. This includes transformations in news gathering, verification, and distribution, as well as how audiences receive and interpret AI-assisted news content (Arguedas & Simon, 2023; Kotenidis & Veglis, 2021; Lin & Lewis, 2022). Research on AI and journalism can be mapped broadly into five core categories.

The first category comprises studies documenting newsroom experimentation with AI to optimize journalistic work. Early research on AI and journalism was largely conducted in Western countries, particularly in major media organizations (Chan-Olmsted, 2019; de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022; Jones & Jones, 2025). Studies described AI as a continuation of computational journalism (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021; Graefe, 2016; Thurman, 2019). As computing technologies advanced, newsrooms began experimenting with AI to support tasks previously situated within the framework of computational journalism. In this phase, adoption tended to be limited and confined to specific beats or used only at particular stages of production, such as assisting in large-scale data analysis. Thus, innovation in AI-driven journalism was dominated by well-resourced news organizations with substantial financial and human capital (de-Lima-Santos & Salaverría, 2021; Simon, 2022).

In the second phase, scholars began examining structured integration of AI into newsroom operations (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Simon, 2024). While initial experimentation was focused on individual journalists’ use of AI tools, subsequent initiatives integrated AI more systematically and holistically into newsroom workflows. Scholars accordingly framed AI implementation as a managerial decision rather than an individual journalist’s choice (Drula, 2025). In this context, journalists’ personal perceptions of AI adoption were often considered secondary to organizational strategy.

Moreover, AI's integration into newsroom workflows was no longer dominated by large media organizations, as was the case during the experimental stage (Beckett, 2019; Beckett & Yaseen, 2023). Instead, adoption expanded across various types of media organizations and countries (Diakopoulos et al., 2024; Onebunne, 2026). This shift reflected the global diffusion of AI and the increasing affordability and accessibility of AI technologies. Simultaneously, seminars and training on AI in journalism proliferated in the Global South, aiming to accelerate technological diffusion beyond Global North countries (Luttrell et al., 2020; Ncube et al., 2025; Radoli, 2024). Research in this phase further highlights organizational, economic, and structural factors that influence AI adoption (Hermida & Simon, 2025).

The third research category focuses on how audiences perceive news produced by or with the assistance of AI (Kiskola et al., 2025). Findings vary regarding public perceptions of AI-generated news. Some emphasize issues of transparency, readability, and trust (Gondwe, 2025; Nanz et al., 2025; Park & Thomson, 2025), while others suggest that audiences consider AI-assisted news to be lacking a human touch (Ndlovu, 2024). Audiences tend to express discomfort with fully automated formats and expect certain aspects of journalistic work to remain under human control (Park & Thomson, 2025). In the case of AI news anchors, audience perception is also shaped by the interplay between visual realism and individual familiarity, where more human-like appearances significantly boost credibility and news quality ratings (Choi & Jang, 2026).

A fourth body of research has examined journalists' attitudes toward AI adoption in their professional practice. In some studies, journalists often did not regard AI as a threat, instead viewing it as a supportive tool, particularly for personalizing news content and undertaking time-consuming tasks such as interview transcription (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026). Other scholars reported that AI's increasing dominance in journalistic processes raised concerns about diminishing journalistic autonomy (Kuai & Thomson, 2025; Munoriyarwa & de-Lima-Santos, 2025). Some journalists also interpreted the integral adoption of AI within newsrooms as a direct threat to job security (Amigo & Porlezza, 2025; Yu & Huang, 2021). Amid widespread newsroom layoffs that were rationalized by efficiency concerns, AI was deemed more as another cost-cutting instrument that might reduce the need for human journalists, especially in the Global South where the economic and institutional support for journalists have tended to be limited (Munoriyarwa et al., 2023). Nevertheless, such concerns are not uniform; some journalists expressed greater vulnerability than others.

A fifth branch of research explores visual journalism, and distinct and intensified concerns raised by AI technologies capable of generating not only text but also visual and audiovisual content (Matich et al., 2025; Thomson et al., 2025). Unlike earlier forms of automation that primarily affected data gathering, information processing, or written news, generative AI (GenAI) could directly intervene in image-making, video production, and on-screen presentation—core elements of television journalism. Studies identify at least three recurring AI-related problems impacting visual journalism: the spread of misinformation, the erosion of objectivity and authenticity in visual content, and the risk of labor displacement (Thomson et al., 2025). These issues are particularly salient for television journalists, whose professional authority is closely tied to visual credibility and on-screen presence. Research shows examples of visual journalists in the Global South adapting AI tools to benefit local cultures and conditions, but they remain concerned about potential degradation of their roles, labor relations, and the profession's future (Ndlovu, 2024). Role perception provides a lens for examining how AI adaptation affects television journalists' understanding of their roles and shifting configurations of work within their field.

2.2. Journalistic Role and Professional Identity

Role perception theory has been central to understanding how journalists interpret their professional responsibilities and evaluate changes within the media environment. Role perception refers to “generalized expectations which journalists believe exist in society and among different stakeholders, which they see as normatively acceptable, and which influence their behavior on the job” (Donsbach, 2012, p. 1). Role perception is generally a “followed script that has been internalized and is located in the larger social structure, but did not necessarily form a mental representation of that role for a particular journalist” (Mellado et al., 2017, p. 6). Journalism scholars understand these roles as discursively constructed and socially negotiated frameworks that shape how journalists view the societal function of their work (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Mellado, 2021). Rather than merely following institutional routines, journalists actively interpret their work through normative frameworks that shape their decisions, priorities, and the boundaries of professional authority. As Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) further argue, journalistic roles are continuously negotiated between journalists, news organizations, and broader societal expectations, influencing how journalists understand their professional identity and how journalism is regarded by the public.

Scholars have conceptualized these professional orientations through different role typologies that reflect journalism’s diverse normative commitments. Mellado (2015), for instance, identifies key journalistic roles that may coexist within news practice, including the interventionist, watchdog, loyal-facilitator, service, infotainment, and civic roles. These roles represent different ways in which journalists position themselves in relation to power, audiences, and public life. Such roles do not operate in isolation but often overlap and coexist, reflecting tensions between normative ideals and the practical constraints of specific media environments (Mellado, 2021).

Within this framework, journalists’ responses to technological change result from more than the capabilities of new technologies. Instead, such responses to new tools are filtered through existing professional identities and role conceptions, including what constitutes legitimate journalistic work (Kuai, 2026). Technologies that appear to threaten core aspects of the profession, such as editorial judgment, professional autonomy, or public credibility, are more likely to generate resistance or skepticism (S. Wu, 2026).

The adoption of AI presents a particularly significant case for examining these dynamics (Lewis et al., 2025). AI technologies increasingly automate tasks that were previously associated with journalistic expertise, including data analysis, news writing, editing, and even on-screen presentation (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022). As a result, journalists may be compelled to renegotiate the boundaries between human and automated labor (Jamil, 2021). For instance, AI-generated presenters raise questions not only about television newsroom routines but also the symbolic dimensions of professional identity. Television journalism has historically relied on the visibility and recognizability of human reporters to establish credibility and emotional connection with audiences. The possibility of AI avatars occupying similar roles might therefore challenge deeply embedded assumptions about what constitutes authentic journalistic presence. From this perspective, examining journalists’ role perceptions becomes crucial for comprehending how AI adoption is interpreted at the level of everyday professional practice.

2.3. AI and Structural Pressures in the Indonesian Broadcasting Industry

Indonesia's media landscape provides a distinctive context for examining the relationship between technological innovation and journalistic labor (Haryanto, 2018, 2024). Indonesia's television industry has historically been dominated by free-to-air broadcasting supported primarily by advertising revenue (Kitley, 2000), with 695 television stations serving diverse audiences across the archipelago in 2023 (Sudoyo, 2023).

Globally, television industries have shifted from scarcity-based to abundance-based media economics (Maniou & Seitanidis, 2018), reshaping relations between broadcasters, platforms, and audiences. In Indonesia, broadcasters have responded through multi-platform distribution, digital content strategies, and business model innovation (Briandana & Irfan, 2019; Briandana et al., 2020; Hakim & Hidayati, 2023; Saefulloh & Kusumalestari, 2025; Setiadi et al., 2021), although these efforts have yet to compensate for declining broadcast revenues. Intensifying digital competition and political conflicts of interest among media owners (Tapsell, 2017) have also contributed to declining television consumption and public trust.

This economic and structural instability creates a complex environment in which journalists interpret AI experimentation and adoption. Understanding how journalists navigate competing interpretations of potential gains in productivity and creativity on the one hand, versus concerns about workforce contraction and erosion of professionalism on the other, therefore requires empirical attention to their own perspectives and lived experiences. Existing studies often focus on implementation or organizational strategies, while the perspectives of practitioners, particularly in broadcast journalism and the Southeast Asian context, remain less explored. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Indonesian television journalists perceive the role of AI in broadcast journalism?

RQ2: How do these perceptions relate to journalists' professional role conceptions and autonomy?

RQ3: How do broader industry conditions shape journalists' interpretations of AI adoption in television newsrooms?

3. Research Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach to enable in-depth exploration rather than quantitative measurement of the phenomenon (Bryman, 2012). Researchers conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 20 journalists from 12 newsrooms that represented the majority of Indonesia's public and commercial networks and one digital-native television service (see Table 1). The participants comprised three occupational categories—news producers, presenters, and reporters—thus providing perspectives from distinct professional roles within newsrooms. The sample also enables examination of how differences in role and seniority within editorial structures shape views on uses of AI in journalistic work, and how role perceptions influence these interpretations.

Informants were recruited through snowball sampling, drawing on professional networks within the Ikatan Jurnalis Televisi Indonesia (Indonesian Television Journalists Association) to select participants with prior experience in using AI in their journalistic work. Interviews were conducted between June and December

Table 1. Informants' profile.

Name	Position	Media Organization	Years of Experience
Amalia Satriani (Amalia)	Producer	BTV	5+
Ramlan Hakim (Hakim)	Producer	CNBC Indonesia	10+
Mayfree Syari (Mayfree)	Producer/Presenter	CNN Indonesia	5+
Laurensia Ghata (Ghata)	Reporter	CNN Indonesia	3+
Fazilah Khairunnisa (Fazilah)	Producer/Presenter	iNews	10+
Camar Al Farabi (Camar)	Reporter	iNews	3+
Gisellya Noorrahma (Gisellya)	Reporter	iNews	3+
Frisca Clarissa (Frisca)	Producer/Presenter	Kompas TV	10+
Taufik Ilham Riyady (Taufik)	Reporter	Kompas TV	2
Sarah Ruhendi (Sarah)	Reporter	Metro TV	3+
Bayu Mahesa (Bayu)	Producer	MNC TV	10+
Lungguh Ginanjar (Lungguh)	Producer	Narasi TV	5+
Juan Robin (Juan)	Reporter	Narasi TV	3+
Mario De Lima (Mario)	Producer	RTV	10+
Olivia Ferari (Olivia)	Reporter	RTV	3+
Zeki Rahmat (Zeki)	Producer	SCTV	10+
Sita Paprika (Sita)	Producer	tvOne	10+
Kurnia Ikhlasul Amal (Amal)	Reporter	tvOne	5+
Alma Safitri (Alma)	Producer	TVRI	5+
Muhammad Arif Darmawan (Arif)	Reporter	TVRI	10+

2023 via Zoom and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. The interview guide addressed several themes, including the use of AI in everyday journalistic practices, newsroom policies regarding AI, professional views on integrating AI into journalistic work, and expectations for the future of television journalism as AI becomes increasingly embedded into newsrooms.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enables systematic identification and interpretation of patterns across qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers reviewed each transcript while listening to the original recordings to correct errors and missing segments, ensuring the dataset's accuracy and completeness. Coding proceeded iteratively, combining inductive and deductive strategies. Initial codes were derived from both the manifest meanings expressed by participants and recurring themes within interviews, then were refined and consolidated into broader thematic categories. The thematic analysis was conducted collaboratively by the first three authors of this article through iterative coding and ongoing discussions to ensure consistency and interpretive rigor. Accordingly, the study prioritized reflexive agreement and analytical depth throughout the analytical process. The final coding scheme comprised four key thematic domains: the use of AI in everyday journalistic practices; views on GenAI, including opportunities, risks, ethical considerations and standards, and organizational adoption; perceived limitations of AI in television journalism (RQ1 and RQ2); and journalists' professional roles, competencies, skills, and broader societal responsibilities (RQ2 and RQ3).

4. Findings

4.1. *AI as a Tool for Peripheral Tasks*

The research revealed that Indonesian television journalists' understanding of AI in journalistic work remains relatively limited. Several informants noted that they began to build awareness of AI technologies in television news production when tvOne introduced an AI news anchor. Prior to this, they primarily associated AI with GenAI, which commenced an exponential global rise in the months preceding the debut of tvOne's AI anchors.

Other informants, particularly those who closely followed technological developments, recognized that technologies predating the recent GenAI wave were also part of the broader AI ecosystem. These include tools such as Google Voice Assistant and Google Maps, which journalists have long used in their daily work. Consequently, elements of AI have been embedded in journalistic practices for more than two decades, notably well before the current surge of public attention and hype surrounding AI.

Reflecting their relatively limited knowledge, most informants explained that the adoption of AI technologies within their journalistic routines remained modest. They emphasized that AI was positioned as a supporting tool within their daily work processes. Field reporters, for instance, frequently used AI-powered applications to convert recorded interviews with sources into text. Meanwhile, journalists involved in video editing tended to utilize AI features embedded in editing software to facilitate faster and more efficient editing workflows.

Informants underlined how such practices significantly improved work efficiency in television journalism, particularly for tasks that were repetitive and time-consuming. Accounts from both reporters and producers stressed AI being used primarily as a productivity-enhancing technology that reduced repetitive tasks, suggesting that AI adoption in the newsroom has been driven by efficiency considerations rather than editorial automation. Indonesian television journalists thus tended to perceive these tools as extensions of existing production technologies rather than systems capable of independently generating journalistic content.

4.2. *Human Authority in Editorial Decision-Making*

Despite acknowledging the benefits of AI-assisted production tools, informants asserted that editorial authority must remain under human control and AI could not replace professional human judgment. Television producer Amalia exemplified this perspective, stating: "AI is only used to support our work....The finishing touches still are the journalist's obligation" (interview, October 13, 2023).

This framing reflects journalists' broader efforts to maintain the boundaries of professional expertise. Informants repeatedly stressed that AI could assist technical processes, but key editorial responsibilities, such as determining news angles, selecting relevant information, and interpreting events, required human judgment. Several interviewees argued that journalistic work was inherently dynamic and contextual, making it difficult for automated systems to replicate. One journalist explained his perceptions on why human personalization of information was indispensable by describing how different journalists who reported on similar events would still interpret and frame the story differently depending on their analysis and perspective (Camar, interview, October 17, 2023).

Informants highlighted the importance of editorial interpretation in television journalism's visual storytelling, which often prioritizes images and visual sequences before scripts are written. One television producer explained:

Especially when it comes to the news angle and editorial judgment in television, visuals are more important. Sometimes I select the visuals first before writing the script. The script only accompanies the images. If AI is only processing data, it might be able to produce something like an annual report. But deciding what is interesting to highlight first, or what news angle to take, still requires human judgment and analysis. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

Television journalists thus maintained that despite recent advances in AI that might assist with processing data or generating text, human editorial judgement was still required to identify which visuals were most compelling or determine how a story should be framed visually.

Informants further emphasized the importance of verification and editorial responsibility. They expressed concern that AI-generated content could produce misleading information if not carefully checked. One journalist warned that although AI may process data efficiently, errors or poorly structured outputs could lead to misinformation if journalists relied on them uncritically. As a result, informants stressed that AI-generated outputs must always be cross-checked by journalists through additional sources or direct verification with news actors. Notably, in Indonesian television news and current affairs content, AI is rarely involved in the final product, except for the use of AI news anchors that have been introduced by some television news channels.

Informants voiced concerns regarding the humanistic dimension of journalism, particularly empathy and social judgment. Reflecting public-service values that are ingrained in both interventionist and civic journalism roles, they argued that journalism involves more than simply compiling and disseminating information. It also requires emotional sensitivity, intuition, and ethical considerations when representing social issues. One typical comment was:

But our task as journalists is to give a voice to people who do not have one—the voiceless. Journalists do have to remain neutral in certain situations, for example during political debates. However, when reporting other types of news, showing empathy can make the story resonate more with the audience. There are some aspects that simply cannot be replaced. AI still relies on databases, plug-ins, or similar systems, and at the moment nothing is truly comprehensive enough to replicate that. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

Research demonstrates that perceived humanness and empathy of AI-generated communications are heightened by strategies such as imitating users' messaging styles, customizing responses to their needs, using affective language and motivating appeals, and employing optimistic expressions (Rafikova & Voronin, 2025). AI communications that express concern, support, understanding, and validation commonly increase users' perceptions of AI warmth and relational closeness (Y. Wu, 2025). Despite AI mimicry of empathy, the journalist's comment above illustrates the informant group's conviction that AI systems lack capacity to convey empathy when reporting stories involving vulnerable communities or social injustice.

The informant furthermore mirrored professional ideology that good journalism amplifies marginalized groups' voices in narratives designed to resonate with audiences:

It is more about sharpening the story and taking a stance. If it were left to AI, it would simply process the data in a neutral way. The judgment needed to support citizens who are experiencing injustice would not come from AI. Technically, AI might help process data—for example, statistics on the number of people living in poverty—but choosing the news angle and setting the agenda still require human judgment. (Bayu, interview, October 17, 2023)

These mission-oriented narratives have increased salience for television news presentation. Informants argued that emotional tone, facial expressions, and vocal delivery have remained important elements in conveying meaning to viewers. While AI-generated news anchors may technically deliver information accurately, the journalists questioned whether such systems could replicate the emotional nuance required in certain types of news, from human-interest stories to reports involving tragedy and social suffering.

Television journalists thus demonstrate patterns of conditional technological acceptance that align with their understanding of core journalistic roles. Informants reinforced professional boundaries by asserting that key journalistic functions, such as editorial decision-making, verification, and interpretive framing, must remain under human control:

A journalist has a responsibility to present facts. So, those facts, which determine whether information is newsworthy or not, are something that I don't think AI can replace. Because choosing the right angle, choosing the right news story, and perhaps also what I mentioned earlier about news values, those cannot be replaced by AI. (Amalia, interview, October 13, 2023)

Through such statements, journalists reaffirm their roles as information gatekeepers and interpreters, responsible for determining newsworthiness and shaping narratives for the public. AI is thus positioned again as an auxiliary technology embedded within journalistic workflows rather than an autonomous system capable of replacing journalists' core professional roles and responsibilities.

4.3. Perceived Limits of AI

In articulating why they believed AI could not fully replace journalistic work, informants frequently doubted AI's capacity to operationalize journalism's interpretive and creative dimensions. Two journalistic functions were frequently defined as requiring human agency: contextualizing information and explaining the significance of events. One reporter gave the example of economic reporters creating reports about survey data from the national agency, Statistics Indonesia: "How do we interpret the current downward trend and the potential impact of its increase in the coming months?" (Amalia, interview, October 13, 2023).

Such statements highlighted the perceived importance of analytical interpretation, which informants believed AI systems could not adequately replicate. Several journalists emphasized professional competency norms, in that journalism requires a level of creativity and adaptability that extends beyond automated processing.

Informants also identified communicating, networking, and interacting with their information sources as another core television journalism competency that they believed AI could not fulfil:

For example, building relationships with sources, chatting with sources requires a wide range of topics to build rapport. It requires critical thinking and empathy. There are several aspects of the human mind that AI doesn't yet possess. I doubt it can achieve that. We build close networking with sources, chatting with them—that's a form of interaction between humans, right? (Olivia, interview, December 18, 2023)

These views reinforce perceptions that AI technologies may assist routine tasks but remain limited in performing journalism's core intellectual and interpretive functions.

While AI-assisted production tools were largely judged to be beneficial, AI-generated news presenters raised complex concerns among informants. Camar, one journalist, explained: "We still rely on the power of human presenters or anchors because they can directly research and provide conclusions, which AI may not be able to do at this time" (interview, October 17, 2023). Informants noted that news anchors represented not only the delivery of information but also visibility and recognizability as the public face of the newsroom, and they established credibility and emotional connection with the institution behind it. As a result, informants expressed disquiet that replacing human presenters with AI avatars could potentially alter the symbolic relationship between journalists and audiences. As argued by one reporter: "Indonesian viewers want to see the presenter's emotion immediately so that viewers at home may know, comprehend, and feel what the presenter is saying in the news" (Gisellya, interview, December 10, 2023).

Another perceived limitation was that AI presenters might be helpful in contexts that required few interactions, but complicated programs like talk shows required presenters with human cognition, responsiveness, and spontaneity:

It [an AI presenter] may be feasible to replace news bulletins. However, it cannot substitute for "Breaking News" or interactive dialogue. In interactive discussion, we ask questions, the source responds, and we must be able to critique, analyze, conclude, rephrase, or even propose new questions based on the source's answers. AI does not yet have this capability. When a source responds something, we [humans] can ask follow-up questions because we understand what they're saying. (Camar, interview, October 17, 2023)

This concern reflects broader understandings of how closely credibility and trust are tied to human presence in television journalism. As one reporter stated:

AI will not completely replace news presenters. There was also a lot of talk on tvOne using AI avatars to replace them, but we saw for ourselves that there was no humanity there, no sense of humanity, no emotion displayed. (Juan, interview, October 17, 2023)

AI presenters may therefore be interpreted not merely as technological innovations but as developments that challenge established assumptions about authenticity in television news presentation.

4.4. Technological Change Without Professional Displacement

Despite acknowledging the rapid development of AI technologies, most informants suggested that technological change was more likely to transform media platforms, production routines, and newsroom practices than replace journalists. Amalia exemplified this perspective by stating: “The profession itself will not be displaced; the medium might change” (interview, October 13, 2023). Her statement indicates how Indonesian television journalists interpreted AI as part of a longer trajectory of technological change in their industry. Rather than perceiving AI as an immediate threat to their professional existence, informants situated it within a broader history of media transformation, where new technologies have continuously reshaped production processes while leaving journalism’s fundamental functions intact. From this viewpoint, technological innovation affects *how* journalism is practiced rather than *whether* journalism will continue to exist.

Informants acknowledged that certain operational roles within television news production were increasingly vulnerable to automation. They were concerned that positions such as news presenters could be replaced by AI-generated avatars, particularly following experiments with AI news presenters introduced by tvOne. Nonetheless, some, such as Juan, continued to rationalize tvOne’s AI anchors as fitting within the framework of historic transformation rather than existential threat: “Maybe tvOne did something like that to make people aware of tvOne, and it was a huge success. It was an initiative to make the audience aware that their media organization is embracing technology” (interview, October 17, 2023).

While such developments demonstrate the technical feasibility of AI-generated presenters, informants noted that several television stations have not continued developing these technologies beyond initial trials. Interviewees suggested that long-term adoption of AI presenters was limited by practical considerations, including audience reception, production costs, and editorial credibility.

Informants also forecasted that some backstage roles, such as news editing, could eventually be partially automated as AI-based editing software becomes more sophisticated. Automated tools capable of organizing footage, generating rough cuts, or assisting with scriptwriting would reduce the need for certain routine editorial tasks.

Informants were convinced, however, that the crucial nature of gathering and editing visuals meant that the role of television journalists, especially camera operators, was irreplaceable by AI. One reporter dismissed the possibility of substituting AI for camera operators, due to the specific visual aesthetics of television broadcasts and the requirement for coordination between camera crews and reporters about what content needs to be visually captured: “Maybe the editing can be replaced, and the soundman too, now that we can even do the dubbing itself [with AI]. That’s the most it can do” (Arif, interview, October 13, 2023). Journalists expressed assurance that final editorial decisions, such as determining narrative structure, selecting key visuals, and ensuring contextual accuracy, would continue to require human oversight.

Discussions about technological change were frequently linked to the economic pressures facing the Indonesian television industry. Informants described how shifting audience consumption habits, driven by competition with digital-native media outlets and social media platforms, had already forced television stations to adapt their production strategies. AI technologies were viewed in this context as potential tools

for further cost efficiency through automation of certain production processes to help broadcasters manage continuous news production with limited budgets and resources.

Journalists insisted that in the balance of technological experimentation and streamlining of newsroom operations, economic pressures must not compromise journalists' core professional responsibilities, due to journalism's ostensible importance in maintaining healthy information ecosystems. They believed that journalism's classic normative functions of providing credible news by verifying information and creating meaningful public narratives were essential services that could not be delegated entirely to automated systems:

Because the journalists' job is to act as a watchdog, to be accountable to their own audience for everything....If we can't be credible media or journalists, how can we be trusted in the future? So, I want to build trust, and that's what we need to do in the future. Don't provide false information, because this is also related to credibility. (Juan, interview, October 17, 2023)

This conviction that human characteristics are vital for verification and combatting mis- and disinformation was consistent with Indonesian television journalists' interpretations, discussed above, that AI could not directly replace journalism but instead formed part of broader processes of technological and economic transformation of journalistic work. While some production roles might evolve or become partially automated, informants consistently reaffirmed the continuing relevance of journalistic roles such as gatekeeping, interpretation, and public accountability.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The data indicate that Indonesian television journalists generally interpreted the emergence of AI in pragmatic rather than alarmist terms. Most participants did not perceive AI technologies as an immediate threat to the profession. In line with previous studies (Cools & Diakopoulos, 2026; Jamil, 2021; S. Wu, 2026), Indonesian television journalists tended to frame AI as a complementary tool that could assist certain stages of the production process. This perspective reflected a broader pattern observed in studies of AI adoption in journalism, where news workers interpreted technological innovation through the lens of established professional norms and occupational identities rather than as a force that would fundamentally disrupt journalism (Møller et al., 2025).

This study shows that Indonesian television journalists interpret technological innovation largely through the normative frameworks that define their professional roles. From the perspective of journalistic role theory, the findings indicate that despite advances in AI, Indonesian television journalists have continued to prioritize role conceptions associated with human editorial judgment, professional responsibility, and interpretive authority. As highlighted in the literature on journalistic roles, journalists often understand their professional identity through normative ideals such as the intervention, watchdog, and civic roles (Mellado, 2015). For example, the continued emphasis on verification, contextual interpretation, and editorial oversight reflected the enduring importance of the intervention role (Mellado, 2015), in which journalists highlight their professional interpretation before sharing the information to the public. Journalists expressed concern that excessive reliance on automated tools could weaken the investigative dimension of journalism or reduce the critical scrutiny necessary for accountability reporting. While AI assisted journalists in

processing information or automating routine tasks, it was not deemed to be capable of replacing the critical judgment required for investigative, evaluative, or breaking news journalism.

Journalists' reflections on audience engagement and storytelling also pointed to their esteem for mobilizing and infotainment roles in contemporary journalism (Møller et al., 2025), and the perceived human agency embedded in those roles. Although some journalists acknowledged that AI-generated news presenters might offer new ways of attracting audiences, they maintained confidence that the "human touch" remains essential. In the case of AI anchors, audiences still expect the presence of human journalists and their emotional depth (Ndlovu, 2024), concurring with the television journalists' assessments about central aspects of professional identity that AI technologies cannot fully replicate. These findings highlight the distinctive nature of broadcast journalism, which relies on visual performance and human-likeness to establish audience trust (Choi & Jang, 2026). Unlike automated text production, broadcast journalism involves performative and relational labor closely associated with human presence and authenticity. Consequently, informants believed AI could not fully replace core visual journalism functions due to its limitations in capturing, evaluating, and presenting real-world visual content.

While informants acknowledged the economic pressures, technological inequalities, and organizational constraints shaping AI adoption in Indonesia and other Global South newsrooms (de-Lima-Santos & Ceron, 2022), they gave limited attention to how these pressures might deepen through AI-driven workforce downsizing. Such developments could encourage greater automation despite potentially undermining the distinctive benefits of human-generated visual journalism. Reflecting their self-acknowledged limited understanding of AI, informants also rarely considered whether rapid advances in AI capabilities might eventually narrow the current gap between human- and AI-produced visual reporting.

Beyond these role-related considerations, the findings demonstrate that journalists' perceptions of AI are shaped by the broader structural conditions of the Indonesian media system. AI adoption often occurs in a fragmented and experimental manner rather than as part of a systematic newsroom transformation. This pattern reflects scholarship on AI and journalism in the Global South, where studies in Pakistan, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria similarly demonstrate that journalists tend to adopt AI selectively for routine and efficiency-oriented tasks while maintaining a strong attachment to human editorial authority and professional judgment (Jamil, 2021; Munoriyarwa et al., 2023; Ndlovu, 2024; Onebunne, 2026), highlighting the importance of journalistic roles as discursive constructions (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017). Hesitant about full automation, journalists negotiate AI within conditions of economic instability, limited technological infrastructure, and ongoing newsroom precarity. The Indonesian case reinforces arguments that AI adoption is shaped less by technological determinism than by locally specific institutional constraints and professional cultures.

Nevertheless, the findings also suggest subtle forms of labor transformation within Indonesian television newsrooms. AI tools were primarily accepted for peripheral and repetitive tasks; however, this efficiency-oriented adoption might simultaneously intensify newsroom expectations for speed, multitasking, and productivity under increasingly constrained economic conditions. Rather than eliminating journalistic labor entirely, AI might redistribute labor by reducing the time allocated to technical production while increasing pressure on journalists to produce content more rapidly across multiple platforms. This reflects broader concerns in journalism studies that automation often restructures labor processes and professional

routines even when core editorial authority formally remains under human control (Lewis et al., 2025; Simon, 2024), thereby posing new challenges to journalistic roles in today's "AI turn" in journalism.

In exploring normative frameworks and structural realities that influence Indonesian journalists' role perspectives on AI adoption, this study has limitations. Apart from informants from the Narasi TV digital media startup, which operates primarily through online channels such as its website, YouTube, and social media, informants for this research worked for legacy terrestrial networks with added online platforms rather than digital-native television organizations. The research thus might not fully capture the diversity of AI adoption in digital-native newsrooms where AI might be more extensively integrated. Additionally, the relatively small sample size and use of snowball sampling may limit the representativeness of the findings and potentially exclude perspectives from journalists outside these professional networks. Future research should therefore explore how different media platforms, newsroom policies, and organizational strategies shape the long-term integration of AI journalistic practice, especially in Global South contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the authors.

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