

**THE REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITY IN INDONESIAN ONLINE NEWS  
REPORTS: A CORPUS-ASSISTED DISCOURSE  
STUDY**

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**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2025**

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by

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**January 2025**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Allah SWT for His endless blessings, guidance, and strength throughout this journey. Without His mercy and grace, this thesis would not have been possible.

Secondly, I am profoundly grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Hajar Abdul Rahim and Dr. Kumaran Rajandran, for their invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement. Their expertise and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping this work and bringing it to fruition. I am deeply indebted to them for their patience and dedication.

I would also like to thank my PhD sponsors, *Balai Pembiayaan Pendidikan Tinggi* (Center for Higher Education Funding) and *Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan* (The Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education), for their generous financial support. Their assistance has been crucial in enabling me to pursue and complete my doctoral studies.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to my parents, Achmad Marzuqi and Ulifah, for their unwavering love, support, and prayers. Their belief in my abilities and constant encouragement have been a source of strength and motivation throughout my academic pursuits.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my wife, Rizki Amelia, and children, Rumi Ahmad Al Fajri and Lubna Aysila Al Fajri, for their endless support, understanding, and sacrifices. Their love and patience have been a constant source of inspiration, and their presence has given me the strength to persevere through the challenges of this journey. I owe them “time” that I could not spend with them during my stay in Pulau Pinang to complete my PhD.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDS	Critical discourse studies
CADS	Corpus-assisted discourse studies
CL	Corpus linguistics
PWD	People with disability
WHO	World Health Organisation
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
IDC15	Indonesian Disability Corpus 2015
IDC20	Indonesian Disability Corpus 2020
LCC	Leipzig Corpora Collection
PWSD	People with sensory disability
PWMD	People with mental disability
PWPD	People with physical disability
PWID	People with intellectual disability

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# **REPRESENTASI ORANG KURANG UPAYA DALAM LAPORAN BERITA DALAM TALIAN INDONESIA: KAJIAN WACANA BERBANTU KORPUS**

## **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini mengkaji bagaimana individu kurang upaya digambarkan dalam laporan berita Indonesia antara 2011 dan 2020. Kajian ini secara khusus meneliti (1) bagaimana orang kurang upaya digambarkan dalam media dalam talian Indonesia sepanjang tempoh ini, (2) gambaran empat jenis kecacatan (sensori, mental, fizikal, dan intelektual) dalam artikel berita ini, dan (3) persamaan dan perbezaan dalam gambaran media mengenai orang kurang upaya sebelum dan selepas penguatkuasaan *Undang-Undang Disabilitas Indonesia 2016*. Data untuk kajian ini terdiri daripada korpus khusus laporan berita Indonesia yang menampilkan pelbagai istilah yang merujuk kepada individu kurang upaya. Laporan berita ini diperoleh daripada laman berita dalam talian terkemuka Indonesia, masing-masing dikawal oleh organisasi media yang berbeza. Rangka kerja analitikal untuk kajian ini mengintegrasikan rangka kerja *CADS Baker dan McEnery* (2015a, 2015b), *van Leeuwen's Social Actor Network* (2008), dan *news media models of disability* (Clogston, 1990, 1994; Haller, 1995, 2010). Analisis tentang gambaran individu kurang upaya antara 2011 dan 2020 menunjukkan bahawa mereka kebanyakannya digambarkan sebagai penerima pasif dan objek representasi. Trend ini menunjukkan kecenderungan untuk meremehkan penglibatan aktif orang kurang upaya dalam masyarakat, selaras dengan model patologi sosial kecacatan. Sebaliknya, model progresif seperti model hak sivil dan model pengguna, yang menekankan penyertaan aktif orang kurang upaya, jarang ditemui. Mengenai gambaran empat jenis kecacatan yang berbeza, penemuan menunjukkan bahawa individu dengan kecacatan penglihatan

kebanyakannya digambarkan sebagai penerima alat bantu, sumber, dan kemudahan, yang selaras dengan pendekatan patologi sosial kecacatan yang berlaku. Gambaran ini menekankan pergantungan mereka pada peralatan tersebut untuk melakukan tugas harian, menekankan pengaruh manfaat kemajuan teknologi. Sementara itu, individu dengan gangguan mental kebanyakannya digambarkan sebagai penderita dan pesakit dalam konteks perubatan, memfokuskan pada gejala, diagnosis, dan rawatan. Media juga sering mengaitkan kecacatan mental dengan tingkah laku jenayah, menggambarkan individu ini sebagai pelaku jenayah. Selain itu, gambaran individu dengan lumpuh kebanyakannya bersesuaian dengan rangka kerja perubatan dan patologi sosial. Mereka digambarkan memerlukan campur tangan dan perhatian perubatan, dan digambarkan sebagai mudah terdedah dan bergantung. Dari segi gambaran individu dengan kecacatan intelektual, penemuan menunjukkan bahawa individu, terutamanya kanak-kanak, dengan sindrom Down kebanyakannya digambarkan sebagai mempunyai kecacatan genetik, gangguan kongenital, kecerdasan rendah, jangka hayat pendek, dan risiko kematian yang tinggi. Gambaran ini selaras dengan model perubatan kecacatan. Tambahan pula, kajian diakronik mendedahkan beberapa persamaan dan perbezaan dalam terminologi, pembinaan, dan model media berita tentang kecacatan yang digunakan oleh media Indonesia sepanjang dua tempoh lima tahun yang berbeza (2011-2015 dan 2016-2020). Walau bagaimanapun, kata kunci yang berkaitan dengan model perubatan dan patologi sosial kekal dominan dalam kedua-dua tempoh tersebut. Kajian ini menyimpulkan dengan menekankan keperluan untuk menggambarkan representasi yang lebih adil terhadap individu kurang upaya, dicapai melalui penyertaan lebih banyak berita yang menekankan agensi mereka dan perspektif mereka yang pelbagai untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih lengkap tentang cabaran dan pengalaman mereka.

**THE REPRESENTATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN  
INDONESIAN ONLINE NEWS REPORTS: A CORPUS-ASSISTED  
DISCOURSE STUDY**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examines how disabled individuals are portrayed in Indonesian news texts between 2011 and 2020. It specifically explores (1) how people with disability are depicted in the Indonesian online media during this period, (2) the depiction of four types of disabilities (sensory, mental, physical, and intellectual) in these news articles, and (3) the similarities and differences in media depiction of disabled people before and after the enactment of the 2016 Indonesian Disability Law. The dataset for this study consists of a specialised corpus of Indonesian news articles that feature various terms referring to disabled individuals. These news stories are sourced from eight prominent Indonesian online news sites, each controlled by different media organisations. The analytical framework for this research integrates Baker and McEnery's (2015a, 2015b) CADS framework, van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Network, and news media models of disability (Clogston, 1990, 1994; Haller, 1995, 2010). The analysis of the portrayal of disabled people between 2011 and 2020 reveals that they are predominantly depicted as passive beneficiaries and objects of representation. This trend suggests a tendency to downplay their active involvement in society, aligning with the social pathology model of disability. In contrast, progressive models such as the civil rights and consumer models, which emphasise the active participation of people with disability, are scarce. Regarding the representation of four different types of disability, the findings suggest that individuals with visual impairments are mostly depicted as beneficiaries of assistive devices,

resources, and facilities, which aligns with the prevailing social pathology approach of disability. These depictions emphasise their dependence on such gadgets to perform everyday tasks, emphasising the beneficial influence of technological progress. Meanwhile, individuals with mental disorders are mainly portrayed as sufferers and patients in a medical context, focusing on symptoms, diagnoses, and treatments. This reinforces the view of mental health issues as medical concerns only. Media also often links mental disabilities to criminal behaviour, depicting these individuals as crime perpetrators. Moreover, the portrayal of individuals with paralysis predominantly corresponds to the medical and social pathological frameworks. They are portrayed as requiring medical intervention and attention, and are depicted as susceptible and reliant, frequently eliciting pity and acts of benevolence. Regarding the representation of individuals with intellectual disabilities, the findings suggest that individuals, especially children, with Down syndrome are predominantly portrayed as having genetic defects, congenital disorders, low intelligence, short life expectancy, and high mortality risks. These portrayals align with the medical model of disability. Furthermore, the diachronic study uncovers several similarities and contrasts in the terminology, construction, and news media models of disability employed by the Indonesian media throughout two distinct five-year periods (2011-2015 and 2016-2020). However, keywords related to the medical and social pathology models remain dominant in both periods. The study concludes by highlighting the necessity of portraying a more equitable representation of disabled individuals, achieved through the inclusion of more news that emphasises their agency and their diverse perspectives to gain a fuller understanding of their challenges and experiences.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter first presents the background of the study. Definitions of disability and general situations of disabled people in Indonesia are then discussed. Next, it introduces the problem statement, the study objectives, and the research questions respectively before providing the significance of the study, and the scope and limitations of the study. Lastly, it presents the definition of key terms and thesis organisation.

### **1.2 Background of Study**

News media play a pivotal role in society, serving social, educational, and political functions (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003). Through the consumption of news, individuals seek to comprehend and interpret how events depicted in news reports are interconnected with their lives and broader society (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003). News can also exert a significant effect on governments and major institutions, influencing policymakers and the policy process (Bednarek & Caple, 2012; Happer & Philo, 2013). News, therefore, does not only function as a source of information but also as a tool that can form public opinions or change how society and government see a particular issue and a group of people.

However, it should be noted that news is not an objective reflection of facts or social reality (Fowler, 1991) as it is culturally and ideologically determined which encodes fixed values (Caldas-Coulthard, 2003; van Dijk, 1988). These values serve as guidelines for journalists in determining what should be reported. All events or issues are not naturally newsworthy, but they are given newsworthiness by news agencies

through the discursive representation of specific “news values” (Bednarek & Caple, 2014, 2017).

In determining newsworthiness, news producers also take into account readers’ views (Brindle, 2016) because values in society are (re)formed through “the discursive interaction between the newspaper text and the reader” (Fowler, 1991, pp. 46-47). This suggests that news media and their readers affect and reflect the ideology of each other (Bednarek & Caple, 2012), and thus ideologies embedded in news texts may also show mainstream ideological stances within a society.

In addition to the event selection, news writers always have different word or sentence structure choices in reporting the same event, and differences in wording and expressions can bring about different portrayals (Fowler, 1991; Gerhard & Schäfer, 2014), and distinct interpretational patterns in viewing social identities and issues (Habermas, 1996). As Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) point out, language is a system network of options from which a speaker or writer can choose a specific sentence structure or wording based on social functions it can serve. In this regard, with these selection processes, news can be an effective tool to disseminate and perpetuate specific values or ideologies.

Because of these vital roles of news, a substantial body of research has examined news discourse by using various approaches and paradigms, including content analysis, framing analysis and critical discourse studies (CDS). Among them, CDS is the most extensively used in this research area (Wang, Wu & Li, 2022) since it is characterised by unveiling ideology, power, and social inequality through the systematic and “retroductable” analysis of semiotic data (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), including news texts. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, the combined application of corpus linguistics and (critical) discourse studies has experienced a dramatic

increase, which provides more perspectives for analysis on news discourse (Wang et al., 2022) and offers new approaches and tools for evaluating CDS (Xiao & Li, 2021, p. 498). Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) have endeavoured to investigate the construction of a particular socio-political issue and identity of a social group in news discourse to deliver ‘voices’ for the minority and underprivileged. Social issues and group identities that receive more attention are those related to politics, gender, immigration, Islam, race and terrorism (Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). For instance, Serafis et al. (2021) employ CADS approaches to unmask discriminatory representations of migrants and refugees in the Italian press, while Al-Hejin’s (2015) study reveals how BBC News mostly constructs Muslim women in situations linked to conflict and crime. Meanwhile, a few issues are still under-researched, which include disability and disability-related identities in news media.

Disability is now generally acknowledged as a significant issue in society, politics, everyday life, and the media (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). It is more accurately described as a social phenomenon with important social causes, settings, and dynamics, instead of being considered as a medical or health issue (Ellis & Goggin, 2015). It is thus more viewed as a human rights issue (Heap, Lorenzo & Thomas, 2009). People with disability (henceforth PWD) in the world are significantly increasing due to several causes including rises in chronic health conditions (World Health Organization, 2021). However, they frequently face violations of their rights, prejudice and disrespect owing to their disability. Their media representations also tend to be stereotyped and negative (Ellis & Goggin, 2015), which can alter society’s attitudes towards them (Happer & Philo, 2013). For example, Keller et al. (1990) show that in American newspapers, persons with disabilities are referred to as individuals identified by the generic label “handicapped”. In another study, Clement and Foster

(2008) indicate that people with a mental disability, schizophrenia, are canonically constructed as being violent and dangerous in the British newspapers. Such negative media portrayals tend to contribute to the process of stigmatisation of disabled people (Bowen et al., 2019). This is emphasised by Zhang and Haller (2013), who state that the perceived realism of negative media representations can devalue the self-identity of individuals with disabilities.

In a substantial body of literature that investigates the media portrayals of PWD, the majority of studies tend to focus on media in Western or developed countries (Bendukurthi & Raman, 2016) and employ non-linguistic approaches. For example, Goethals et al. (2020) studied the representation of disability in the Flemish print newspapers and entertainment magazines. They found that the media has a tendency to maintain and reinforce the stigma associated with people who are classified as disabled as ‘Other’ and disability as one of the most terrifying impediments to living a full life. In a more recent study, Pesonen et al. (2021) examined the representation of people with autism in the Finnish press by using framing and content analysis. Their study revealed more balanced representations. However, they suggested that Finland seems to be an “outlier” in the study on autism media coverage and argued that unique cultural norms in Finland may play a role in affecting the way Finnish newspapers approach autism. This indicates that different countries may have different media constructions of PWD. Dominant discourses in Asian media, such as Indonesia, may differ from those in Western media because of different socio-cultural norms and practises. However, studies on media constructions of disabled people in non-Western or developing countries, particularly Indonesia, which apply linguistic approaches, are still scarce. Indeed, there is no study that uses CADS approaches to analyse Indonesian news media portrayals of disabled people.

Therefore, following previous studies (e.g., Clement & Foster, 2008; Zhang & Heller, 2013), but employing different theory, methodology and context, this study aims to examine news media constructions of PWD in Indonesian online news portals. A detailed discussion of the research gaps that are relevant to this study will be provided in the statement of the problem (Section 1.5) and in Chapter 2 (literature review). To accurately situate this study, definitions of disability and general situations of disability in Indonesia will be discussed first in sections 1.3 and 1.4 respectively.

### **1.3 Defining Disability**

Disability has been defined in several ways, yet a global or consensus definition that fits all circumstances is hard to find (Grönvik, 2009; Mitra, 2006; Palmer & Harley, 2012) due to the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the concept (Altman, 2001). This issue has been raised since 1960s by Haber (1967) and Nagi (1965, 1976) who state that the terminology used to describe disability is commonly inconsistent and there seems to be substantial confusion over concepts and criteria of disability.

There are a number of different models or conceptualisations of disability which influence its definition. The first is a moral or religious model of disability (Brzuzy, 1997; Kaplan, 2000). It associates PWD with sin, shame, and guilt, deserving of their plight for their own or their family members' sinful behaviour (Andrews & Elliot, 2014; Brzuzy, 1997). It also sees PWD as burdens, particularly to families (Andrews & Elliot, 2014). The moral model excludes individuals with disabilities from having a significant role in society (Andrews, 2017). Instead, this paradigm encourages social exclusion and might potentially lead to self-loathing (Andrews, 2017). This model has been accepted in many cultures and it is still relevant in many societies

(Avoke, 2002). However, it seems less prevalent nowadays (Andrews, 2017; Kaplan, 2000).

The next model comes from medical views. Disability is presented as a pathological condition, resulting from either a congenital genetic or biological abnormality, or an acquired illness or condition (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). A person with a disability is considered as an individual that has inability to perform “normally” in society because of physical or mental impairments resulting from injury or disease (Kaplan, 2000; Barnes & Mercer, 2003). It only recognises disability as a public health concern resulting from impairment, while neglecting other factors, such as the social and economic difficulties experienced by those with disabilities (Marutama et al., 2023). This concept puts responsibility for disability solely on the individuals, and thus society and the environment have no “underlying responsibility to make a ‘place’ for persons with disabilities, since they live in an outsider role waiting to be cured” (Kaplan, 2000, p. 353). Therefore, interventions are predominantly from medical aspects, including rehabilitation, and social assistance programs, such as welfare benefits (Mitra & Robinson, 2023; Palmer & Harley, 2012). Disability activists point out that while PWD may need medical treatment, it is simplistic and lacking in understanding to view the medical system as the suitable place for addressing disability-related policy issues (Andrews, 2017). This model, in conjunction with the economic model which views disability in relation to a paid-for-work capacity, is usually used as the basis for administrative definitions of disability, that is, people are considered disabled if they are granted a welfare benefit aimed at PWD (Hedlund, 2000). This, therefore, tends to result in various definitions as different welfare systems have different eligibility criteria.

The next conceptualisation is social, which challenges moral, medical and economic models. The social model to a large extent describes disability as a social construct. It recognises the importance of social, economic and political factors in the creation of disability (Andrews, 2017; Barnes et al., 2002; Brzuzy, 1997), focusing on social and environmental barriers or discriminations faced by PWD instead of individual impairments (Degener, 2017; Hahn & Pool Hegamin, 2001). Hence, cultural and political changes are seen as key solutions (Barnes et al., 2002). Barnes et al. (2010, p. 163) highlight that “it is society which disables people with impairments, and therefore any meaningful solution must be directed at societal change rather than individual adjustment and rehabilitation”.

As persons with disabilities frequently experience social discrimination or inequalities, the social model is also conceptualised as the minority model, particularly in the USA, which considers PWD as an oppressed minority. As Hahn (2002, p. 171) states,

Social inequalities encountered by persons with disabilities are considered as similar to those encountered by other minorities such as “extraordinarily high rates of unemployment, poverty and welfare dependency; school segregation; inadequate housing and transportation; and exclusion from many public facilities.

This model has been a tenet of disability movements and a significant political tool for the social inclusion and empowerment of PWD in several countries (Oliver, 2013).

However, this model has also been criticised for failing to address impairment or neglecting the experience of impairment of disabled people (Degener, 2017) as it tries to separate impairment from disability entirely (Bingham et al., 2013). As Oliver (1996, p. 38) argues, “the social model is not an attempt to deal with the personal restrictions of impairment but the social barriers of disability”. In the social model, impairment is considered an ‘abnormality’ or a functional limitation of an individual

caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment (Forhan, 2009), while disability is seen as restrictions of activity caused by a society that takes no account of persons with impairments and therefore excludes their participation in social activities (Anastasiou & Kauffman, 2013). In this regard, having an impairment is not inherently disabled (Blustein, 2012). With this separation, Palmer and Harley (2012) argue that this model does not fully account for the lived experiences of persons with disabilities, contributing to the little robust study on the lives of disabled people and limiting the development of disability-specific policy. Another critique of the social model is that it fails to consider differences among individuals with disabilities, presenting them as one unitary group (Oliver, 2013). It neglects identity politics, which encompass various impairment categories and causes, as an essential component of emancipation (Degener 2017). This is because it focuses on social power relations rather than personal liberation (Degener, 2017).

In response to these critiques, the social-relational model, a refined version of social model, has been developed (Reindal, 2008, 2009). It focuses on both personal and social effects of impairment (Thomas, 2004; Reindal, 2008). More specifically, it recognises disability as the result of social restrictions on participation of PWD, as well as acknowledging the biological aspect of impairment and psycho-emotional dimension of disability as significant influences (Martin, 2013). In this way, the constructs which form the social-relational model include impairment effects, social attitudes or discourse, structural barriers, and psychological wellbeing (Allan et al., 2020). This model appears to be in line with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definition of disability. WHO (2021) defines disability as "the interaction between individuals with a health condition (e.g., cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and depression) and personal and environmental factors (e.g., negative attitudes,

inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports)”. This study is in agreement with the social-relational model and WHO’s definition in the sense that it acknowledges that social attitudes have a profound effect on the experience of individuals with disabilities. Attitudes towards disability reflect views or beliefs about disabled people and thus guide behaviour towards them (Roberts & Smith, 1999). One of the significant factors that affect the attitudes of society towards PWD is information accessed by people (Yuker, 1994; Daruwalla & Darcy, 2005). Hence, news media, from which most people look for any information, can play a significant role in constructing individuals with disabilities and influencing social attitudes towards them. News has a great influence on society’s perceptions of disabled people and distorted representations can contribute to a lack of understanding about their lives and the social and political concerns that impact them (Haller, 2010).

#### **1.4 Disability in Indonesia**

Around 15 percent of the world’s population live with some forms of disability (Albrecht, 2011), while 80 percent of them live in developing countries (World Health Organisation, 2011). Compared with other countries, the number of PWD in Indonesia is rather higher because of several conditions, including lack of healthcare knowledge, poor traffic and occupational safety, higher probabilities of disasters, and malnourishment caused by poverty (Halimatussadiyah, 2017; Kusumastuti, Pradanasari & Ratnawati, 2014). Cameron and Suarez (2017) indicate that between 4 and 11 percent of Indonesian population or at least 10 million Indonesians are affected by a disability. In 2015, Intercensal Population Survey revealed that 8.56 percent of Indonesians aged two and above are individuals with disabilities (Larasati et al., 2019), while National Socio-Economic Survey 2018 shows that there are 30.38 million

persons with disabilities in Indonesia, 14.2 percent of the population (Simanjuntak, 2021). However, the exact number of PWD in Indonesia is unidentified (Kusumastuti et al., 2014) since several surveys or censuses suggest different numbers of PWD by using different model definitions (Cameron & Suarez, 2017; Halimatussadiyah, 2017; Wardana & Dewi, 2017; Suharto, Kuipers & Dorsett, 2016). The lack of reliable data and statistics can lead to some challenges faced by persons with disabilities, such as a lack of provision of services and accessibility (Wardana & Dewi, 2017).

One of the barriers for PWD to participate in society is physical accessibility, which plays an important role in marginalising and excluding them (Yeo & Moore, 2003). Many persons with disabilities in Indonesia still cannot access public transportation and places such as museums, schools, universities, shopping centres and tourism sites because of their inaccessible designs (Suwandi et al., 2020; Syafi'ie, 2014; Thohari, 2019). This inaccessibility is one of the factors that cause disabled people difficult in obtaining several public services including health (Marella et al., 2019), finance (Thohari & Rizky, 2021), education (Moriña & Morgado, 2018; Wibowo & Muin, 2018) and employment (Ferdiana et al., 2021). Providing accessible infrastructure is seen as a secondary agenda in addressing disability issues in Indonesia since many regulations are based on a provision of charity or a charity model, instead of fulfilling PWD's rights (Wardana & Dewi, 2017).

Besides physical accessibility, social barriers are also faced by PWD in Indonesia. This refers to society's behaviour, attitudes, and stigma towards disabled people. Stigma refers to a mark, condition, or status that is susceptible to devaluation (Sartorius, 2007). Endriyani and Yunike's (2017) study, for instance, points out that Indonesians with intellectual disability frequently get social rejection and stigma in society, making them difficult to conduct social interactions. They are also often

considered as a family disgrace (suggesting moral/religious model of disability), which makes some families prefer to institutionalise them to avoid a shame associated with having such a family member (Komardjaja, 2005). Additionally, in the workplace, PWD are frequently viewed as unproductive employees, and liabilities to their company (Kwon, 2021), contributing to high unemployment rates among disabled people (Ang et al., 2015; Brouwers, 2020), and leading to a neglect of their rights (Kusumastuti et al., 2014). Such stigma is not physically visible and therefore more difficult to identify and change (Komardjaja, 2001). Eliminating negative stereotypes or social stigmas can be the initial action in establishing more inclusive environments for those with disabilities. The effectiveness of providing accessible infrastructure or services may be hindered if individuals with disabilities or their families continue to feel embarrassed about leaving their homes due to the stigma associated with their impairments.

Both physical and social barriers have impeded full and effective participation of Indonesian disabled people in several sectors in society. For example, in education, the participation of PWD remains problematic (Irwanto et al., 2010). Children with disabilities in Indonesia still face several barriers to attend and finish school (Mizunoya et al., 2016) because of a wide range of reasons that extend well beyond their medical condition, such as family, school and community factors (Cameron & Suarez, 2017). The negative views associated with disabled children make their families ashamed or overly protective of their children so that they prefer to hide their children instead of sending them to school (Adioetomo, Mont & Irwanto, 2014; Riany, Cuskelly & Meredith, 2016). Additionally, the school and its broader environment that are ill-equipped to support PWD, such as teachers that lack necessary training, and curricula and teaching methods that fail to accommodate the nature and need of students with

disabilities, also contribute to their lower participation in education (Cameron & Suarez, 2017). In the Indonesian labour market, individuals with disabilities also have a much lower labour force participation or employment rate than people without disabilities (Halimatussadiah et al., 2017). They mostly work in low-paid jobs or the informal sector (Nurhayati, 2020). Inaccessible work environments and negative attitudes in the workplace are some of the obstacles faced by PWD to obtain decent work (Cameron & Suarez, 2017)

The Indonesian government has already imposed a number of laws, policies and regulations concerning the issues of persons with disabilities. The first law was enacted in 1997, namely Law No. 4 of 1997. This law perceives PWD from the medical and charity model of disability, that is, disabled people are conditioned to be sick individuals or physically and mentally abnormal, passive recipients of rehabilitation programs, and objects of social charity and welfare (Simanjuntak, 2021; Wardana & Dewi, 2017). It uses the term *penyandang cacat* (people who have/with defects) to refer to PWD, which is demeaning to persons with impairments (Suharto et al., 2016), and seen to be highly offensive by disability rights groups (Kuwado, 2011). While the English translation of this phrase “people with defects” is uncommon and considered inappropriate in contemporary English usage, this translation is used to accurately convey the stigmatising and derogatory implications embedded in the original Indonesian term. This term is based on a deficit model of disability which emphasises physical and mental defects as the cause of disadvantages experienced by PWD (Tsaputra, 2019). To counter this labelling, Indonesian disability activists in Yogyakarta (one of the provinces in Indonesia) have proposed the term *difabel*, which is derived from the concept of “differently abled people” (Suharto et al., 2016, p. 700). It emphasises the ability of persons with disabilities instead of their inability caused

by physical and environmental barriers (Suharto et al., 2016). This term has become popular among PWD in Indonesia, especially in Yogyakarta and some parts of Central Java (Dibley & Tsaputra, 2019; Maftuhin, 2016; Soleh, 2016). Nevertheless, the use of *difabel* (differently abled person) has been criticised by several scholars and Indonesian disability activists, and it also fails to receive official recognition at the national policy level in Indonesia. The term opponents state that it is not clear because everyone is *differently abled* (Suharto et al., 2016). It is also considered as condescending, patronising, and offensive or just a way to avoid discussing disabilities. As Tsaputra (2019) suggests, since the term *difabel* highlights the significance of ability, it is likely to trivialise the factual disabling experiences of individuals living with disability and discourage conversations on disability and what it means being disabled people.

In terms of policies, although the Law No. 4 of 1997 recognises the rights of PWD in education, employment, rehabilitation, accessibility, and equality in the development of aptitudes (Kusumastuti et al., 2014), the implementation is far from what is expected (Irwanto et al., 2010) and predominantly driven by a mentality of paternalism (Tsaputra, 2019). In education, for example, PWD are guaranteed to have the same opportunity to acquire primary and secondary education, but only at segregated schools depending on their type of impairment and level of capacity (Edwards, 2014), instead of in mainstream settings. In this regard, this law tends to authorise segregated education (Edwards, 2014), resulting in further marginalisation of disabled people.

Indonesia then ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2011 through Law No. 19/2011 regarding Ratification of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (henceforth the 2011

UNCRPD Ratification Law). It changes Indonesia's official paradigm on disabled people from a charity-based approach to a human rights-based approach (Irwanto & Thohari, 2017). A term used to refer to disabled people in formal or official documents has also been changed to *penyandang disabilitas*, which is adapted from the preferred English expression "people with disability" (Edwards, 2014). However, this law has not adopted the Protocol (Wardana & Dewi, 2017), and its implementation has been hampered by restrictive regional and national laws (Edwards, 2014). Indonesian Disabled People Organisations (DPO) and other disability groups then demand the involvement of PWD in the law-making process. Because of this active participation and pressure from disability advocacy groups, on 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 2016, a new legislation concerning disability, Law No. 8/2016 (henceforth the 2016 Disability Law), was enacted (Dibley, 2019), which has opened a new opportunity for PWD to participate in the development process (Wardana & Dewi, 2017).

It provides Indonesia with a legal basis for the fulfilment of the rights of disabled people (Pertiwi, Llewellyn, & Villeneuve, 2020). This law also distinguishes four broad types of disabled people, which are physical disabilities such as *lumpuh* (paralysis) and cerebral palsy, sensory disabilities such as *buta* (buta) and *tuli* (deaf), mental disabilities such as *skizofrenia* (schizophrenia) and bipolar, and intellectual disabilities such as *sindrom down* (down syndrome). It should be noted that other countries may have different categorisations of PWD. For instance, Wilkinson and McGill (2009) consider autism as an intellectual disability in the UK, while in the Indonesian law it is categorised as mental disability. Hence, since this study is situated in Indonesia, it will use the four classifications written in the 2016 Disability Law when discussing and analysing the representation of specific types of disability.

Nevertheless, despite the enactment of the law, services for disabled people seem to continue to focus on the provision of charity and social welfare (Dibley & Tsaputra, 2019) and many PWD, particularly in villages, are not aware of regulations and benefits available for them (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2019). In addition, they also still experience discrimination, prejudice, and unequal access to education and health services since policymakers lack the knowledge and the will to promote the rights of persons with disabilities (Ramawati & Block, 2020).

### **1.5 Statement of Problem**

Disabled people are frequently seen by their impairments, instead of other qualities (Tremain, 2005) and thus they continue to face barriers to fully participate in society (Devotta et al., 2013). In Indonesia, they have been commonly viewed as being defective (Pertiwi et al., 2020) and mostly referred to as *penyandang cacat* (people with defects), *kelainan* (abnormality), and *berkebutuhan khusus* (special needs) (Priyanti, 2018). These ableist terms have circulated in Indonesian official documents and news media (Pertiwi et al., 2020; Priyanti, 2018). The phrase *penyandang cacat* (people with defects) is even the most used terms in Indonesian academic articles, compared with *difabel* (differently-abled) and *penyandang disabilitas* (people with disability) (Maftuhin, 2016).

The use of those ableist terms plays an important role in disability studies as language is a form of social practice or action (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Disability-related terminology that is used in a society may reflect how a society perceives people with impairments (Dibley & Tsaputra, 2019; Suharto et al., 2016) and the way a community attributes stigma to define them (Brocco, 2015). Language employed to depict impairment, especially in news media, is also one of the significant instruments

in disabling people (Harpur, 2012). As Corbett (2013) points out, inappropriate language choices to describe PWD can contribute towards their marginalisation. Community views on persons with disabilities are not only reflected but also formed by the terms they choose and the language they use (Bolt, 2012, p. 15). In this sense, the kind of language to construct disabled people should be thought about critically as it can be a powerful factor in influencing and changing social and cultural attitudes towards them.

Language used in media, therefore, plays a significant role in affecting society's view on disabled people since news media is frequently the main source of information, serving as a platform for raising public awareness of social issues and identity constructions for members of minority groups, such as individuals with disabilities (Slopen et al., 2007). It also has the ability to form our ideas and behaviours (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 6). In the context of disability constructions, news media can both reflect and reproduce prevailing conceptions and attitudes towards disability (Goggin, 2009). They have a significant impact on the lives of disabled individuals in a nuanced and dispersed manner, and their underlying ideologies are challenging to identify (Sandell et al., 2010). Ellis et al. (2020) emphasise that mass media has a crucial role in affecting the lives of disabled individuals and forming diverse political, social, cultural, and attitudinal perspectives on disability. Furthermore, media representations of PWD frequently mirror the way disability is being socially constructed in a particular socioeconomic and political context (Carr, 2011; Theodorou & Mavrou, 2017). For instance, Briant et al.'s (2013) research indicated that there was a decrease in the portrayal of PWD as people in need in UK newspapers between 2004 and 2011, and at the same time there was a change of attention to disability and benefits in the society with the emergence of issues concerning "undeserving" disabled that

was a cost to society. In this regard, it is essential to investigate the way PWD is portrayed in the news media.

Studies on the media representation of disability have been conducted in various disciplines including communication (Vertoont et al., 2021), journalism (Burns, 2016), and rehabilitation science (Reinhardt et al., 2014). Film and literature have become the loci of study, while news media received rather little attention (Bendukurthi & Raman, 2016). Most research uses non-linguistic analyses (e.g. Devotta et al., 2013). They tend to employ classical methods such as content analysis (e.g. Burns & Haller, 2015; Chen et al., 2012) and framing analysis (e.g. Bendukurthi & Raman, 2016). The findings of these previous studies indicate that disabled people, including children, are constructed in undesirable manners such as being excessively reliant on others.

Nevertheless, few studies which compare and contrast media portrayals of PWD in two different periods suggest that there are changes in their representations, either more negative or positive. For example, Briant et al. (2013) demonstrated that there had been a considerable negative change in the way disability was reported in the UK news media in 2010/2011, compared with 2004/2005. Meanwhile, Devotta et al.'s (2013) research showed a positive shift in how individuals with disabilities were portrayed in Canadian news media between 1998 and 2008, with a greater emphasis on the complexities of their identities and different societal responsibilities. Political and societal changes appear to influence the news media depiction of disability (Theodorou & Mavrou, 2017). In this way, a diachronic study on language used to construct disabled people in news media is recommended to spot changes in their portrayals. Additionally, many studies focus on either disability in general or specific impairment only (McAndrew et al., 2021). There are only a few studies that investigate

media constructions of different types of impairment or disability. Komardjaja (2005) states that among PWD, people with ‘intellectual’ disability are the most stigmatised in society, suggesting that different types of disability may have different social constructions.

Bendukurthi and Raman (2016) emphasise that the majority of studies on the portrayal of PWD focus more on the media in Western or developed countries and use data in English. There is still limited research that is conducted in developing countries, especially Indonesia, and uses linguistic approaches. To date, there are only two studies on disability representation in Indonesian news media. Tsaputra (2016) investigated the portrayal of PWD in three major Indonesian newspapers. Analysing 11 news articles published between December 2010 and January 2011, he found that nearly all articles depict PWD in a negative way, focusing on the disability instead of the person. In a similar vein, by using critical discourse analysis, Priyanti (2018) examines the representation of PWD in an English-language newspaper in Indonesia published from January 2013 to April 2014. She also found that PWD are discursively portrayed as weak, and defective people that need help and charity.

These two studies, however, use relatively small number of data and data sources, which may decrease confidence about the generality of the findings. Also, they do not take into account portrayals of different types of impairment, and the news articles investigated in the two previous studies are published before the enactment of the 2016 Disability Law. Shifts in disability representations in two distinct years or periods may occur due to changes in socioeconomic or political contexts, as pointed out by Briant et al. (2013) and Devotta et al. (2013). Moreover, there is still no study that applies a CADS approach (Baker et al., 2008; Baker & McEnery, 2015; Mautner, 2007; Partington, 2004) combined with Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen, 1996,

2008) and news media models of disability (Clogston, 1990, 1994; Haller, 1995, 2010; Haller et al., 2016) to examine the construction of PWD as social actors in Indonesian news media. This synergy will provide a more comprehensive picture of the way individuals with disabilities are represented in Indonesian news media context.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the afore-mentioned research gaps by analysing the construction of disability in Indonesian online news articles. Online news is selected as the data source because, according to Newman et al.'s (2021) digital news report, it is the most popular news medium in Indonesia (89%), surpassing television, print, and social media, and thus exerts a greater influence on shaping societal perceptions of events and social actors. In particular, this research investigates how language is used to represent PWD in Indonesian online news texts between 2011 and 2020. In addition, it examines Indonesian news media depictions of different types of disabilities or impairments in a ten-year period from 2011 to 2020. As discourse is time-bound (Baker, 2006), it also studies Indonesian news media portrayals of disability in two different 5-year period (2011-2015 & 2016-2020). The two periods are selected because, in 2016, the Indonesian government passed the 2016 Disability Law that follows the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (UNCRPD) in 2011. This study therefore also seeks to understand whether there are differences or similarities in the portrayals of disability before and after the law that supports the eradication of discrimination against PWD is enacted in Indonesia. With these three objectives, the study is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the construction of disabled people in Indonesian news media. To carry out this research, the present study draws on CADS framework (Baker & McEnery, 2015) combined with Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen, 1996,

2008) and news media models of disability (Clogston, 1990, 1994; Haller, 1995, 2010).

## **1.6 Research Objectives**

The present research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify Indonesian online news media constructions of PWD in a 10-year period, from 2011 to 2020.
2. To identify online news media depictions of four broad types of disability (sensory, mental, physical and intellectual) from 2011 to 2020.
3. To compare and contrast Indonesian online news media portrayals of disabled people from 2011 to 2015 (before the enactment of the Disability Law in 2016) with the representations from 2016 to 2020, after the implementation of the law.

## **1.7 Research Questions**

This study endeavours to answer the following questions:

1. How are people with disability constructed in Indonesian online news articles from 2011 to 2020?
2. How are four types of disability (sensory, mental, physical, and intellectual) represented in Indonesian online news articles from 2011 to 2020?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the online news media representation of persons with disabilities before and after the enactment of the 2016 Disability Law?

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

The importance of conducting this research is both scholarly and practical. For scholarly significance, this study is expected to contribute to a body of research examining how journalists write about disability. It is the first large scale linguistic study that investigates how Indonesian news media use language to construct individuals with disabilities by using CADS approaches (Baker & McEnery, 2015) combined with social actor representation framework (van Leeuwen, 2008) and news models of disability (Clogston, 1994; Haller, 2010). It, therefore, is expected to offer a methodological option for future studies that analyse the same issues, especially in Indonesian contexts, as well as providing a foundation for future research combining CADS approaches with social actor representation (van Leeuwen, 2008) and news models of disability (Clogston, 1994; Haller, 2010) to examine portrayals of PWD in news texts other than English. It also adds another context to a body of CADS research in Indonesia that use Indonesian language as data, which is still scarce.

In addition, the results of this study may give a more complete picture of Indonesian media representations of PWD in the last ten years. It is hoped that this study can raise Indonesian news producers' and readers' awareness of the impact of media portrayals on a group of people in general and PWD in particular. Thus, practically, the findings of this research are projected to improve practices of Indonesian news media representation by providing insights or 'a tip sheet' or guideline for Indonesian journalists on how to write about PWD in Indonesian newspapers. Also, the insights gained from this research may be beneficial to disability activists in acquiring a better understanding of government policy related issues that will be essential in their advocacy work. It is also expected that the Indonesian government can use the findings of this study to inform news media companies about

the impact of news media constructions on stigmatised groups so that they become more sensitive about how to report persons with disabilities and disability issues in the future. The results may also be utilised by the government as one of the references for creating laws that regulates language used to write news articles about PWD.

## **1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This section presents the scope and limitations of this thesis particularly in terms of data, theoretical framework, and methodology. This study analyses the construction of disabled people in Indonesian online news articles. Hence, news articles that are in other languages (e.g., English) and published offline only by the Indonesian news media outlets are not included in this research. Also, although the data are collected from 8 Indonesian news websites among the top 20 news portals which have large readerships, this study acknowledges that excluding several news sites may become its limitation. The data of this study is also confined to news reports published from 2011 to 2020. The findings of this research, therefore, might not be generalised to offline news texts, other news websites, and news published before and after the period under analysis.

Another limitation is that it focuses on the analysis of textual aspects of news articles. News can contain non-verbal communication, such as images, that can affect representations of events or groups of people. Discourse refers to semiotic elements of social practices including language, non-verbal communication and visual images (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). This study, however, is restricted to verbal domain, focusing solely on the analysis of language data. In terms of theoretical framework, van Leeuwen's social actor taxonomy (1996, 2008) proposes ten sociological categories, while Clogston's (1990) and Haller's (1995, 2000) news media models of

disability comprise eight models. This study, nevertheless, only exercises several categories and models that are relevant to the data of this research. Regarding methodology, in Chapter 5, this study only examines the most utilised terms to denote a specific type of disability, which may overlook representations stemming from other terminologies.

### **1.10 Definition of Key Terms**

**a. Disability:** There are various definitions of disability. This thesis follows the social-relational model's and WHO's (2021) definition of disability, in that, disability is “the interaction between individuals with a health condition [. . .] and personal and environmental factors (e.g., negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social supports)”. It recognises that social attitudes and discourses have a significant impact on how persons with disabilities experience their lives.

**b. Representation:** Hall (2020, p. 75) defines representation as “the production of meaning through language”. It means “using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people” (Hall, 2020, p. 74). However, in the press, representation is a constructive practice (Fowler, 1991). Events are not communicated neutrally since they have to be conveyed through several mediums with their own features, which are already infused with social values that can potentially generate a certain perspective of events (Fowler, 1991).

**c. Discourse:** Discourse has been defined in several ways in social sciences. This study adopts the definition of discourse as ways of expressing experience, constructing objects, representing reality or seeing the world from a specific point of view (Fairclough, 1995; Sunderland, 2004).

**d. Corpus:** A corpus, in general, is a big collection of language data that is stored electronically, which can represent a particular variety of language or genre (Baker et al., 2006; McEnery, Xiao & Tono, 2006).

**e. Corpus linguistics:** Hunston (2002) defines corpus linguistics as methods for analysing enormous amounts of language data in machine-readable texts that utilise computer software to assist in the identification of linguistic patterns that would be difficult for human eyes to notice on their own.

**f. Corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS):** CADS can be defined as “that set of studies into the form and/or function of language as communicative discourse which incorporate the use of computerised corpora in their analyses” (Partington et al., 2013, p. 10). It aims to uncover what might be called non-obvious meaning, meaning that might be difficult to be identified by naked eyes (Partington et al., 2013).

**g. van Leeuwen’s Social actor network:** This framework is a detailed network system which draws upon “socio-semantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical relevance” to the different categories before looking at their grammatical or linguistic realisations (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 23).

**h. News media models of disability:** These models refer to narrative themes or frames or portrayals of disability in news stories (Clogston, 1990; 1994).

## **1.11 Structure of the Thesis**

Chapter 1 presents the background of this research, including disability definition and information about disabled people in Indonesia, and outlines the statement of the problem, the objectives, the research questions, the significant contribution of this study, the scope and limitation, and definitions of key terms in this