



A BOT FOR EVERYONE

Diatche Harahap's BJTech is developing homegrown chatbots for Indonesia.

BY SHINTYA FELICITAS

It's widely agreed that the rise of AI will have a massive impact on job prospects, as machine can replace humans doing tasks using machine learning and AI. Diatche Harahap, 31, is one of those who is pioneering the use of AI in Indonesia, through his startup BJTech, known formally as the PT Jualan Online Indonesia. "AI will not erase jobs for humans, but it will change them to become more efficient," he says. As such, BJTech is one of the very few companies in Indonesia that is developing local AI (one of the others being e-commerce startup Sale Stock).

Simply put, BJTech provides chatbots for websites. Users of sites can interact with chatbots, which can understand natural language queries, and reply with natural sounding answers, all in real time. The users may not even know they are interacting with a machine, rather than a real person—the bot can answer queries, do transactions

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or provide other services. BJTech has so far developed two chat bots, one called "Bang Joni" that is a generic chatbot used on various sites, and one custom-built chatbot for client BNI Bank named "Cinta." Cinta's name is a tongue-in-cheek—officially it stands for "Chat Intelligence Assistant" but also means

Inspired by the 2013 U.S. romantic science-fiction drama "Her" in which a human male star falls in love with a female-voiced AI assistant, Diatche wanted to create a chatbot that had some of the same user-friendly features, and simplify people's busy schedules. "We want to make people more pro-

"love💎💎? in Indonesia.

While chatbots have been developed and used elsewhere, what's special about Diatche's startup is that these chatbots can converse in fluent Indonesian, even understanding and replying in slang. Diatche first released Bang Joni, even before he had a company, at the end of 2015, and it was available at first on Telegraph and Facebook Messenger (now discontinued). Starting from October 2016 appeared in the LINE application, which currently has 90 million registered users in Indonesia—it also now on Twitter and Blackberry apps. Bang Joni's first use was in the simple task of ordering ticket on Tiket.com, an online ticketing site.

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As the users keep growing, Diatche becomes confident that AI has big market potential in Indonesia, so he established BJtech in August 2017. “AI works similar to the human brain: the more you use it, the more you get feedback, the smarter you get. For BJtech, the stimulation is text input from users,💎💎? he explains. “A machine can be defined as artificial-ly intelligent when it is able to fulfill user expectations, and for our bot it is carrying out transactions.💎💎? Diatche has no background in tech; he studied international business at Curtin University in Australia for his BA and diplomatic studies at the University of Westminster, UK for his MA. After graduation, he was working for an energy company when he first released Bang Joni.

ductive by providing tools to help them do errands,💎💎? Diatche says. Companies using Bang Joni now include Skyscanner, Indonesia railways, XTrans, MatahariMall, Uber, and many others—total users through the various client sites is 600,000 (Cinta will be officially released this month). Currently, BJtech's clients include Bank BTPN, XL, Blackberry Messenger, Cisco and Nadhatul Ulama (NU). The partnership with NU, for example, is aimed at teaching users how to read the Koran. For education, it is partnering with RuangGuru, to create a chatbot teacher that is accessible all over the country.

Wouldn't Diatche's chatbots eliminate jobs? Diatche argues that humans can be freed from boring, repetitive tasks with AI. “We want to make people more efficient and prove that AI can have a social impact. Customers will get a better experience, while the client can save costs,💎💎? he says (BCA already operates a similar chatbot named Vira, for virtual assistant). Diatche is planning to develop other specialized bots this year for the fields of education, law, transportation, and telecommunication.

In 2016, the startup received \$1.3 million funding from PT MFI Sinar Investama. It plans to raise more funds this year, and may open a Singapore office this year. For monetization, BJtech has four ways: transaction-based, project-based, per hit-based and advertising business. Diatche declines to share revenues and pricing, but admits that for now it mostly comes from transaction fees. He claims that the company is focused on product development first. “We need growth more than money, because after we grow, we get the money,💎💎? he laughs.

As a startup, he admits that he and his team must be agile and open-minded. “We live with the pressure every second, against everything—the market, competitors, even investors. When we started this an uncommon tech company, no one would believe in us at first. But we have to keep going, and prove that it works,💎💎? says the founder. Moreover, Diatche wants BJtech to be on the same level as other AI companies all over the world. “This is the time for Indonesians to stop being inferior and be equal with the rest of the world,💎💎? he says.