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Fatherhood and Family Values in Transition: Representations of Communication in *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*

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Abstract: This qualitative study analyzes the representation of family communication patterns in the Indonesian film *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework and Fitzpatrick's Family Communication Patterns theory. The research aims to interpret how family relationships, fatherhood, and parenting values are portrayed through different communication styles. Data were collected through repeated film observation, documentation of seventeen key scenes, and expert interviews with a psychologist to provide interpretative depth. Findings indicate three dominant patterns: the consensual, where communication and decision-making are guided by parents but supported by openness; the pluralistic, emphasizing freedom, empathy, and dialogue; and the protective, characterized by parental authority and limited discussion. These patterns illustrate the negotiation between traditional and modern values in Indonesian families. The film reflects a cultural shift in which emotional expression and communication are becoming central to maintaining familial harmony. Overall, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* serves as a cultural text that mirrors the transformation of fatherhood roles and the redefinition of family values in modern Indonesia.

Keyword: Family Communication Patterns; Fatherhood; Semiotic Analysis; Indonesian Film; Family Values

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Indonesia's film industry has significantly advanced the quality and diversity of local cinematic productions. Film, as a form of mass media, functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium of communication that mirrors, interprets, and transmits social realities. Through audiovisual storytelling, film is capable of communicating values, emotions, and educational messages that resonate deeply with audiences (Alfathoni & Manesah, 2020). In recent years, Indonesian films have increasingly reflected themes that are closely tied to cultural identity, family relations, and moral transformation, offering audiences more than mere spectacle—they provide spaces for reflection and social dialogue.

In early 2020, the Indonesian Film Company Association (APFI) conducted a national discussion titled “*Young Indonesians and Film-Viewing Behavior*.” The event explored the preferences of millennial audiences toward local versus foreign films. Based on a survey conducted across 16 major cities with 1,000 respondents, results from Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting indicated that young Indonesians watch domestic films more frequently than foreign ones (Redaksi, 2020). The survey showed that 67% of youth had watched Indonesian films, compared to 55% who watched foreign films. Among the youngest demographic, 81% of respondents aged 15–22 reported watching at least one local film. The most popular genres among Indonesian youth were comedy (70.6%), horror (66.2%), romance (45.6%), and action (37.4%), whereas foreign film preferences were dominated by action (68%), horror (65%), comedy (46.8%), and romance (34.6%) (Redaksi, 2020).

According to APFI’s Chairperson Chand Parwez, Indonesian cinema has shown remarkable growth since 2016. He emphasized that the industry is committed to producing films that engage audiences through diverse genres while maintaining strong collaborations across creative, business, and educational sectors (Redaksi, 2020). Among the notable films released in 2016 was *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* (*Saturday with Father*), a family drama directed by Monty Tiwa and adapted from the novel of the same name by Adithya Mulya. Although not belonging to the mainstream genres of comedy, horror, romance, or action, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* captured the hearts of audiences through its emotionally resonant storytelling. Its portrayal of love, loss, and resilience within an Indonesian family offered viewers a deeply relatable narrative that stirred empathy and reflection.

The film tells the story of Gunawan and Itje, a married couple with two young sons, Satya and Cakra. Their lives appear happy and harmonious until Gunawan is diagnosed with terminal cancer and told he has only one year left to live. While he confides in his wife, he chooses not to tell his children about his illness, wishing to shield them from grief while they are still young. Faced with the inevitability of his passing, Gunawan devises a way to remain present in his sons’ lives: he records numerous video messages containing advice, moral lessons, and words of encouragement. These videos are meant to be played every Saturday, ensuring that his children continue to feel his guidance even after his death. Over the years, the ritual of watching their father’s recorded messages becomes an enduring form of connection, shaping the sons’ characters and influencing their future lives.

Communication plays a vital role in both individual and social contexts. It is through communication that people express emotions, share knowledge, and construct meaning in their interactions with others (Thoyibah, 2021). Within the family, communication becomes a fundamental mechanism for nurturing socialization, emotional development, and moral guidance. The family serves as the primary environment where children first learn social behaviors and values. Parents—particularly the father and mother—serve as educators, role models, and protectors, whose communication styles directly influence a child’s cognitive and emotional growth (Retnowati, 2021).

Lestari (2012) argues that parenting involves not only fulfilling children’s physical needs but also maintaining a communicative relationship that shapes their values and sense of belonging. Thoyibah (2021) adds that family communication patterns can be understood as interactive processes in which messages are transmitted and interpreted among members with shared meanings and goals. Effective communication fosters harmony, openness, and trust, enabling family members to navigate challenges together. In this sense, films depicting familial communication—especially those centered on the role of fathers—offer important reflections on how interpersonal bonds are constructed and maintained through dialogue, empathy, and symbolic exchange.

In recent years, Indonesian cinema has produced a number of films that thematically explore family relationships, emphasizing communication, resilience, and social change. These films often present moral lessons and emotional insights that audiences can relate to their everyday lives. For instance, *Keluarga Cemara* (dir. Yandy Laurens, 2018) portrays a once-wealthy family forced into poverty after financial betrayal, compelling them to rediscover the meaning of simplicity, unity, and resilience. Another example, *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* (dir. Angga Dwimas Sasongko, 2020), follows a family that appears harmonious on the surface but is fractured by hidden emotional trauma and unspoken truths. Both films center on familial struggles and reconciliation, yet *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* stands out for its unique premise—portraying a father who continues to communicate with his family from beyond the grave through pre-recorded messages.

This narrative device—a father’s voice transcending death through media—offers a compelling exploration of how technology mediates emotional continuity within the family. The father’s recorded videos serve as both communication artifacts and emotional anchors, sustaining the family’s connection and moral integrity. The film thereby embodies a powerful representation of mediated fatherhood: how a paternal figure continues to shape identity and family values even in physical absence. This makes *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* an especially rich subject for communication research, particularly concerning the representation of family communication patterns and the transformation of paternal roles in contemporary Indonesia.

The film’s success is reflected not only in its popularity but also in critical acclaim, having received recognition at the 2016 Bandung Film Festival, the Piala Maya Awards, and the 2017 Indonesian Movie Actor Awards (Rahmawati, 2017). Its resonance with audiences lies in its ability to blend emotional storytelling with everyday realism, making the narrative both intimate and universal. Through its depiction of mediated fatherhood, the film addresses broader societal questions: How do families preserve communication and moral guidance amid loss? How does technology enable emotional continuity and memory? And what values define modern Indonesian fatherhood?

In communication studies, representation is understood as the process of constructing meaning through signs, symbols, and narratives that reflect social realities (Giovani, 2020). Representation, therefore, is not a mere reproduction of reality but a mediated re-creation shaped by language, culture, and ideology. In *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, the representation of family communication becomes a means through which the film expresses cultural values about love, duty, and legacy. The father’s video messages symbolize the enduring significance of dialogue within familial relationships, illustrating how communication can bridge temporal and existential boundaries.

To analyze how these representations operate within the film, this study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic framework, which examines how signs convey both literal (denotative) and cultural (connotative) meanings, ultimately forming myths that sustain social ideologies (Barthes, 2012). According to Barthes, a sign consists of a *signifier* (the form of the sign, such as an image or word) and a *signified* (the concept it represents). The interaction between these elements produces meaning that extends beyond the surface narrative. Applying this framework allows the researcher to uncover the layers of meaning in *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*—from the explicit depiction of family interactions to the implicit messages about fatherhood, sacrifice, and Indonesian family values.

Several prior studies provide a foundation for this research. Murti (2022), for example, analyzed family communication patterns in *Keluarga Cemara* using Fitzpatrick's Family Communication Pattern Theory and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics. Similarly, Ramadani (2020) examined how communication fosters family harmony in *Keluarga Cemara*, also employing Peirce's model. Liemantara et al. (2021) analyzed family communication through John Fiske's semiotic approach in *Dua Garis Biru*. These studies collectively affirm that cinematic representations of family communication can serve as educational and reflective tools for audiences, reinforcing values of empathy, openness, and resilience.

However, this study offers a distinct contribution by focusing on *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* and applying Barthes' semiotic theory to interpret the denotative, connotative, and mythic meanings embedded within the film's portrayal of father-child communication. The novelty of this research lies in exploring how *mediated fatherhood* functions as a communicative bridge, enabling continuity of values and emotional presence beyond physical boundaries. This analytical focus not only expands discussions of family communication in Indonesian cinema but also contributes to broader discourses on how technology and media reshape interpersonal relationships in the digital age.

Drawing on the intersection of film studies, semiotics, and communication theory, this research aims to answer the central question: How are family communication patterns represented in the film *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, viewed through the lenses of denotation, connotation, and myth? By unpacking the symbolic language of the film, the study seeks to illuminate how cinematic representation constructs cultural understandings of family, communication, and the evolving role of fatherhood in modern Indonesia.

Ultimately, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* serves as a mirror reflecting the dynamic transformation of Indonesian family life—where emotional expression, technological mediation, and cultural tradition converge. The film underscores that communication is not merely a linguistic exchange but an act of legacy-building, where words and images become vessels for love, guidance, and remembrance. In exploring these representations, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that situates film as both a cultural artifact and a communicative text, revealing how the art of storytelling continues to shape and reflect the human experience across generations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method, which is used to describe, understand, and explore social phenomena within their natural contexts. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of meaning rather than numerical measurement and seeks to produce descriptive data in the form of words, narratives, and visual interpretations. As Mulyana et al. (2020) explain, qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding phenomena as they occur in social life, analyzing them through multiple interpretive techniques. This approach is especially suitable for examining films, which are rich in symbolic, narrative, and cultural elements that reflect human communication and relationships.

Qualitative research is often referred to as a naturalistic approach because data collection occurs naturally without manipulation. It also aligns with ethnographic traditions, which seek to understand cultural behaviors and communication patterns. In this study, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore how family communication is represented in the film *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*. The study aims to uncover the underlying meanings and values of fatherhood and family communication through the lens of semiotic analysis. Specifically, this research applies Roland Barthes' semiotic model, which interprets meaning through three layers—denotation, connotation, and myth—to identify how visual and verbal signs in the film construct and communicate family values.

The primary data for this study are drawn from the audiovisual content of the film *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*. The data consist of seventeen scenes selected based on their portrayal of family interaction and communication between parents and children. These scenes were collected through documentation, where each relevant segment of the film was captured as still images (screenshots) for detailed semiotic analysis.

In addition to primary data, secondary data were also employed to strengthen the analysis. These consist of relevant academic references such as books, journal articles, prior studies, and theoretical works on family communication, semiotics, and media representation. Secondary data provide conceptual and contextual support for interpreting the primary findings and situating them within broader academic discourse.

Data collection techniques include observation, documentation, and interviews. Observation was conducted unobtrusively by repeatedly watching the film using digital devices, allowing the researcher to identify and record scenes that illustrate family communication patterns. This unobtrusive observation method ensures that data are gathered naturally without influencing the subject matter (Ni'matuzahro & Prasetyaningrum, 2018).

The documentation stage involves capturing and cataloging visual data from the selected film scenes. Screenshots were systematically taken to illustrate moments of interaction between family members. Each documented scene is then categorized according to Fitzpatrick's family communication typology and analyzed through Barthes' semiotic framework to reveal deeper meanings.

To complement these data, in-depth interviews were conducted with a key informant from the field of psychology—specifically, a psychologist, psychology lecturer, or psychology student. The purpose of this interview was to gain expert insights into the psychological interpretation of family communication and how media representations of parent-child interaction might influence viewers' understanding of emotional and relational development. This stage used purposive sampling, meaning the informant was selected based on expertise relevant to the research focus (Wibowo, 2021).

Finally, to ensure data validity, the study employs source triangulation (Creswell, 2013). Triangulation involves verifying data through multiple sources and methods, such as comparing observations, film documentation, literature, and interview findings. By cross-referencing these different data points, the researcher ensures credibility and reliability in interpreting how communication patterns are represented in the film. Supporting documents such as official archives, prior research, and personal notes were also used to strengthen the consistency of the findings.

Through this methodological framework, the study systematically explores the representation of fatherhood and family values in *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, offering a comprehensive understanding of how cinematic storytelling communicates moral and emotional dimensions of family life.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the semiotic analysis using Roland Barthes' framework, this study reveals multiple layers of meaning related to family communication patterns represented in the film *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* (Saturday with Father). The analysis identifies how the film articulates different modes of family communication—particularly consensual, pluralistic, and protective patterns—through signs, gestures, dialogue, and relational dynamics between characters. The researcher also interprets these patterns through a psychological perspective on family interactions and their implications for emotional and social development.

Family communication serves as the primary arena for the development of interpersonal understanding, emotional expression, and value transmission. It functions as the first site of socialization, where children learn norms, behaviors, and emotional regulation

(Moebin et al., 2017). The film presents two central family units: the family of Gunawan and Itje, and the family of Satya and Rissa. Each represents a distinctive model of family communication that mirrors broader transitions in Indonesian family values—from traditional, hierarchical authority toward more dialogic and emotionally expressive relationships.

Consensual Communication Pattern

Through Barthes' semiotic lens, the consensual communication pattern is symbolized by recurring signs of mutual respect and guided dialogue within the Gunawan family. Fitzpatrick's (1987) concept of consensual families describes those that value both open communication and parental authority. Parents encourage children's opinions and emotional expression, yet final decisions remain under parental control.

In *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, this pattern is seen in several scenes. In scene 2, Gunawan and Itje demonstrate open communication with their children, discussing everyday matters in a warm and inclusive manner. Scene 6 depicts marital dialogue where husband and wife express their feelings candidly, representing relational transparency. Scene 16 shows a child asking for permission to play, indicating a safe environment for negotiation between parent and child.

These scenes collectively signify a family dynamic based on openness and emotional reciprocity but anchored in parental leadership. According to Afianti (2020), such communication fosters emotional security and harmonious family relations because it allows dialogue without undermining parental guidance. However, the film also portrays moments of selective disclosure, particularly when parents withhold information to protect their children from worry or distress. This suggests that openness is situational and conditioned by parental judgment about the child's maturity.

Pluralistic Communication Pattern

The pluralistic communication pattern is more prominently reflected in the adult lives of Gunawan's sons and their respective families. Fitzpatrick defines pluralistic families as those emphasizing open discussion and egalitarian decision-making, where parents act more as facilitators than authority figures.

In *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, this pattern is evident in several pivotal scenes. Scene 11 captures the joy of two sons sharing good news with their parents, highlighting an emotional bond built on openness. Scene 32 features a married couple discussing household issues collaboratively, symbolizing partnership in decision-making. Scenes 35 and 52 depict children freely expressing feelings to their mother without fear of reprimand, while scene 87 portrays a harmonious family atmosphere where laughter and playful teasing reflect psychological safety and mutual respect.

These scenes demonstrate that communication within these families is multidirectional—children and parents both contribute to dialogue and decision-making. The relational tone in these interactions suggests a transition from patriarchal authority toward affective egalitarianism, where emotional honesty becomes central to familial harmony. Lestari (2012) emphasizes that such openness enhances marital intimacy, mutual understanding, and emotional resilience, indicating that pluralistic communication contributes to long-term relational stability.

Protective Communication Pattern

Contrastingly, the protective communication pattern emerges in the depiction of Satya's family. In Fitzpatrick's typology, protective families emphasize obedience and authority,

with limited room for open discussion. The parents, particularly the father, prioritize control and discipline over emotional expression.

This pattern is visualized through several semiotic cues in the film. In scene 28, Satya and his wife Rissa argue over childrearing approaches. Satya embodies a stricter, more authoritarian stance, believing that discipline is the key to success. His dialogue, “If I could do it, so can you,” encapsulates his internalized belief in meritocratic effort, shaped by his own upbringing. Rissa, on the other hand, demonstrates empathy and nurturance, favoring gentle guidance.

The contrast between the two reflects the tension between traditional and modern parenting ideologies in Indonesian culture. While Satya’s strictness is motivated by love and a desire to instill resilience, his approach restricts emotional expressiveness and autonomy. According to Nuraini et al. (2017), such patterns often result in children who exhibit high compliance but limited emotional regulation skills, as they learn to prioritize obedience over self-expression.

Satya’s behavior also symbolizes generational transmission of communicative norms. Having been raised under rigid paternal authority, he reproduces the same model, believing it guarantees discipline and success. Yet, as modern contexts demand more emotional literacy, this pattern creates friction, both within the family and internally within Satya himself.

Absence of Laissez-Faire Communication

Interestingly, the film does not present a laissez-faire communication pattern. In such families, as Fitzpatrick suggests, parents show low involvement both in control and communication, leading to emotional detachment. In contrast, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* portrays all family members as emotionally invested, even when communication is tense or hierarchical. This absence reinforces the film’s ideological stance: that communication—whether open or directive—is essential to maintaining familial cohesion.

Each family depicted represents a unique configuration of communication practices shaped by love, cultural expectations, and generational legacies. None of these patterns is portrayed as inherently superior. Instead, the film conveys that effective family communication depends on adaptability and empathy within specific situational contexts (Afrianti, 2020).

Generational and Cultural Context

The film also reflects broader socio-cultural transformations in Indonesian family life. As Nur (2022) notes, earlier generations of Indonesian parents often adopted authoritarian or punitive approaches, associating strictness with moral discipline and filial respect. Corporal punishment and rigid obedience were once viewed as expressions of care. However, contemporary psychological understanding reveals that such practices can suppress emotional development and create communication barriers.

This generational gap is vividly dramatized through Satya’s struggle as a father. His attempt to emulate his late father’s strictness results in misunderstandings with his children, who have grown up in a more expressive and egalitarian environment. Barthes’ concept of *myth* helps decode this narrative: fatherhood in *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* becomes a mythologized ideal, symbolizing responsibility, strength, and moral integrity. Yet, the film simultaneously deconstructs this myth by showing its emotional costs when empathy and dialogue are absent.

Gunawan, the deceased father whose recorded messages guide his sons, embodies a transitional model of fatherhood—one that blends traditional authority with emotional warmth. Through his video messages, he continues to communicate moral lessons infused with affection, showing that fatherhood is not merely about providing discipline but also

emotional legacy. These recorded scenes act as *signifiers* of enduring paternal love that transcends death, reinforcing Barthes' notion of how media can transform everyday gestures into cultural myths.

Psychological Perspectives on Family Dynamics

Interviews with psychologists support the film's portrayal of evolving family communication in Indonesia. According to psychologist NM, Indonesian families exist on a continuum from traditional to modern, influenced by factors such as education, social class, and exposure to urban culture. Many still exhibit *authoritative* or *authoritarian* tendencies, where parents expect to be heard but rarely reciprocate listening. Such asymmetry often stems from cultural values emphasizing respect for elders (*hormat kepada orang tua*).

However, NM also emphasizes that emotional openness, empathy, and shared storytelling are increasingly recognized as foundations for familial resilience. Healthy family communication, she explains, requires mutual respect, emotional safety, and affection—elements that are vividly illustrated through Rissa's gentle parenting style and Gunawan's posthumous guidance.

This psychological perspective aligns with research showing that communication patterns shape children's self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and social adaptability (Moebin et al., 2017). In *Sabtu Bersama Bapak*, children who grow up in open, dialogic families display greater emotional maturity and relational confidence, whereas those raised under pressure exhibit restraint and self-doubt.

Cultural Meanings and Moral Messages

From a semiotic standpoint, the film uses recurring motifs—family dinners, letters, video messages, and scenes of prayer—to signify unity, remembrance, and moral continuity. These elements serve as *signifiers* that link communication with spirituality and moral responsibility. Through them, the film constructs a cultural narrative of Indonesian family life as both traditional and adaptive, balancing hierarchy with affection.

The film's moral dimension reinforces the value of empathy, honesty, and responsibility. By juxtaposing different communication styles, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* invites viewers to reflect on how communication is not only a behavioral practice but also a moral and cultural act. The mother figure, Itje, represents resilience and warmth as a single parent, demonstrating that effective communication transcends gender roles.

Ultimately, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* conveys that fatherhood and family values are in transition—shifting from obedience-based authority toward emotionally engaged parenthood. The film acts as both a mirror and a critique of Indonesian familial ideals, showing that love, respect, and communication are interdependent forces in shaping generational continuity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* provides a vivid representation of evolving family communication patterns in contemporary Indonesian society. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Fitzpatrick's Family Communication Patterns theory, the film reveals three primary communication types: consensual, pluralistic, and protective. The family of Gunawan and Itje illustrates the consensual and pluralistic patterns, where openness, mutual respect, and shared decision-making are central to maintaining harmony. In contrast, Satya's family reflects a protective communication style, marked by limited dialogue and parental dominance rooted in traditional, patriarchal values.

The film highlights a transitional phase in Indonesian fatherhood and family life, where traditional authority gradually blends with modern ideals of emotional openness and equality. It also demonstrates that communication is a moral and emotional foundation of family life—

capable of bridging generational gaps, reducing conflicts, and fostering empathy among members. From a psychological perspective, the study underscores that family communication patterns shape children's emotional expression, self-confidence, and social adaptation. Ultimately, *Sabtu Bersama Bapak* not only depicts intergenerational struggles but also offers moral insight: that effective family communication requires balance between guidance, affection, and freedom.

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