

Communication patterns of Batak single mothers in the *Induk Gajah* series

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ABSTRACT

Background: While popular media frequently stereotypes Batak mothers as strictly authoritarian, the reality is far more complex for single mothers who must navigate life within a patrilineal system that fundamentally limits their structural authority. **Purpose:** This research examines how communication patterns of Batak single mothers in the *Induk Gajah* series (2023) are analyzed to assert authority, negotiate domestic rules, and adapt their parenting strategies in daily interactions, with a focus on their portrayal in the series. **Methods:** Employing a qualitative descriptive design with multilevel textual analysis, the research decodes media representations of maternal sacrifice while contextualizing them within the socio-cultural realities of single-parent households. **Results:** This analysis reveals a clear initial tendency toward an authoritarian-protective pattern, characterized by one-way instructions and strict emotional control. However, a significant shift emerges toward an authoritative-consensual pattern that fosters open dialogue and mutual negotiation. **Conclusion:** This communicative transition reflects Batak single mothers in reclaiming their maternal roles amidst social stigma and vulnerability. **Implications:** Ultimately, this research advances scholarship in television and family communication by mapping how ethnic interaction patterns are shaped by parent's sociological status and underscoring the importance of nuanced representations of single mothers in Indonesian media.

Keywords: Batak single mothers; family communication; Indonesian media; multilevel textual analysis; patrilineal vulnerability

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the number of single-parent families continues to rise, and these families often face various life vulnerabilities (Pujihavuty et al., 2021). Economic pressure and divorce are the primary factors behind this growing phenomenon. The burden on a single mother today is immense. She must earn a living, raise her children, and uphold the family's honor. This is held within the Batak tribe as well. Such circumstances directly shape the family's internal dynamics, particularly regarding the development of conversation and conformity orientations. The entertainment industry frequently draws upon real-life societal experiences. One example is the popular series *Induk Gajah*, which received a warm reception from audiences across Indonesia. By presenting stories that resonate with real life, productions exploring the dynamics of the mother-child relationship have become highly popular. Discourse produced by mass media carries ideological content and often perpetuates specific stigmas and expectations regarding single parents. This research employs Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to analyze visual and verbal signs at the levels of denotation, connotation, and cultural myth, and to examine how the media text reconstructs family communication patterns. The analysis aims to observe instances of resistance amidst the clash between traditional Batak myths and modernization.

Events in society is not merely reflected

by television; perspectives on gender roles and family life are also actively shaped by it (Rajarathnamani, 2019). Visual media serves as a space that continuously reinterprets various cultural archetypes and shapes how society perceives the emotional and structural authority of the mother figure within the domestic sphere. The mother is regarded as a central figure who plays the most dominant role in the family in various contemporary media representations (Maoncha, 2024). However, this shift in narrative has instead given rise to a new set of stereotypes that are equally limiting and rigid, even though the goal is to break down old boundaries regarding domestic life. On Indonesian television, the figure of the mother is often portrayed as representing a specific ethnic group; for instance, Batak mothers are frequently depicted as authoritarian figures.

The popularity of culturally themed programs reveals the deep impact of the mother figure on contemporary popular culture (Hettinger, 2026). One of the Indonesian television series, *Induk Gajah* (2023), depicts a single Batak mother who faces cultural expectations and social vulnerability. Directed by Muhadkly Acho, *Induk Gajah* has been a hit with Prime Video viewers since March 23, 2023. This MD Entertainment production continued with a second season on August 1, 2024, highlighting the story of Ira and Marsel after marriage. This success proves that dramas set in Batak culture are truly unique and humorous. Not only *Induk Gajah*, but Prime

Video also aired *Ngeri-Ngeri Sedap* (2022) and *Tulang Belulang Tulang* (2025). The distinctive Batak visuals and story have now become a much-loved part of pop culture, recognized widely for their iconic accents and dialogue (Hettinger, 2026). Moreover, it is also strong evidence that stories based on Batak culture have found a special place in the hearts of the public. These local stories have become popular entertainment and a new dimension to Indonesia's entertainment industry (Hettinger, 2026). Societal attitudes also glorify the concept of the two-parent family, and this indirectly influences the media to portray single mothers as a suffering group due to their lack of a partner (Bergnehr & Henriksson, 2021). Being a single mother is not easy, as one has to face social stigma, bear the financial burden alone, and mediate complex family dynamics for the well-being of their children. Furthermore, the media reinforces stereotypes in which single mothers are often portrayed as victims of circumstances who must face various challenges on their own, without a partner.

Although the aim is to highlight a story of struggle, this narrative ironically reinforces the negative stigma surrounding single mothers (Valiquette-Tessier et al., 2019). On the other hand, mothers are often the target of public and media criticism regarding their parenting style, whereas the same standards are rarely applied to fathers. The view that child-rearing is the mother's responsibility absolves men of obligations regarding household matters (Mary

et al., 2025). Unfortunately, the television narrative presents only a superficial portrayal of authoritarian behavior, without delving into the motives or pressures that triggered such actions.

The world's view of families and single mothers has changed a lot (Rizzo, 2024). Today, global society no longer sees single mother families as incomplete, failed, or pathetic. Similarly, modern television programs portray single mothers as independent, resilient, successful, and financially stable figures capable of fulfilling their roles without relying on a partner. Thereby breaking away from conventional narratives (Rizzo, 2024). This narrative reinforces the image of the single mother as a woman capable of being a mother without a partner and raising her child on her own. Single mothers in real-life narratives have succeeded in shattering stigma and redefining the meaning of family. Initial assumptions that tended to be pessimistic has now shifted toward a positive interpretation of personal identity and self-worth (Sergeev, 2023). This condition leads single mothers in Indonesia to adapt their communication styles, as this approach serves as a survival strategy amidst complex social and familial challenges. These steps are taken to balance their dual roles following divorce or the death of a partner (Supratman, 2018).

Methodologically, researchers often combine semiotics with psychological frameworks to reveal the emotional truths and relational dynamics in media texts (Novitasari & Nur, 2022). Previous researchers have deployed

semiotic frameworks to expose how maternalism, power relations, and specific family values are structurally constructed through visual dialogue in drama series. Furthermore, studies revealed that the lives of single mothers are not free from social challenges, stigma, financial burdens, and a focus on children (Chavda & Nisarga, 2023; Dharani & Balamurugan, 2024). Meanwhile, sociological perspectives provide a sociological basis for understanding how unconventional family structures can maintain emotional stability through effective conflict management (Sartor et al., 2023). These perspectives are important, but communication practices that function as adaptive strategies in single-family families have not yet been addressed and remain a critical gap. Communication patterns are used as instruments to see how messages are delivered, the interactions that are built, and the speaking style used by single parents to influence child development (Aisy & Purba, 2021; Suheri et al., 2019). Within this context, the protective-authoritarian communication pattern identified in this research can be interpreted as an adaptive response rather than a culturally fixed trait. Overall, research on family communication frequently treats communication patterns as culturally neutral or universal, with limited attention to ethnic specificity and media mediation. Consequently, there remains a lack of research that connects televisual representation, ethnic culture norms (such as Batak patrilineality), and Family

Communication Pattern within the context of single motherhood.

Effective communication serves as a fundamental basis for strengthening the emotional bond between parents and children and plays a role in shaping a child's character (Ambhore et al., 2022). However, when facing pressure, a mother often adopts a specific communication style that gives rise to complex psychological dynamics. The protective-authoritarian communication pattern demonstrated in this research is not merely a sign of cultural stereotypes or a character weakness, but rather a strategy for coping with the burden of dual roles, economic pressure, and the obligation to discipline children.

Single motherhood felt stressful and overwhelming, and they often felt they had no choice (Nazaruk et al., 2026). Being a single parent does not automatically harm children. Successful parenting depends more on economic stability, parents' mental health, and the quality of the parent-child relationship. Family Communication Pattern basically aims to provide control and support to children. Through good communication, harmonious relationships can be created.

The analysis of parent-child communication patterns is based on the development of the Family Communication Patterns theory by (Horstman et al., 2018; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Family Communication Pattern are divided into four types: 1) Consensual pattern is defined by high conversation and high

conformity orientations. In this pattern, families encourage open and intense communication among their members, while still paying attention to hierarchy and emphasizing uniformity of values and beliefs. 2) Conversely, the Pluralistic pattern is defined by high conversation but low conformity orientations. There are communication and interaction within the family, but family members are not expected to always agree or follow the same views. 3) Protective pattern is characterized by low conversation and high conformity orientations. In this pattern, parents do not encourage open dialogue but demand absolute obedience from their children. Here, individual opinions are less valued. The final decision rests with the parents and does not involve the children. 4) Finally, the Laissez-Faire pattern displays low levels of conversation and conformity orientations. Family communication within this dynamic is minimal, and rules regarding compliance are not particularly strict. Consequently, each family member enjoys full freedom to develop independent thinking.

Family harmony encompassing the receipt of social support and the management of life's stresses is a crucial determinant of an individual's happiness and well-being throughout their life (Thomas et al., 2017). As primary role models, the quality of parental interaction and communication significantly determines how a child's personality develops in the future. The key to a harmonious parent-child relationship lies in effective communication. This determines the

extent to which each family member feels free to share their innermost thoughts and feelings (Bakhtiari et al., 2024). For the Batak people, their communication style, often perceived as harsh, does not diminish the fact that the mother is the fundamental pillar upholding the values of family respect. A woman's role encompasses educating children, ensuring the family's economic stability, and upholding the family's honor.

Family interactions often give rise to complex dynamics, requiring single mothers to be discerning in setting boundaries so that parental authority remains aligned with their children's wishes (Hanifah et al., 2023). This pattern aligns closely with parenting concepts that encourage single mothers to adopt an authoritative parenting style rather than an authoritarian one to maintain children's mental health while also honing their social skills (Sanvictores & Mendez, 2022).

The well-being of mothers and children in single-mother families is based on the work of (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Munir et al., (2024) it is influenced by three main aspects namely: 1) Economic strain is understood as financial pressure that arises due to limited resources, financial responsibilities borne alone, and the dominance of mothers in making household decisions. 2) Role strain denotes the role burden where the mother is simultaneously a breadwinner, caregiver, decision maker, and regulator of children's behavior. 3) Socialization difference indicates that single

mothers have a different parenting style. They are more protective through direction because they do not want to take risks, but they also expect strict discipline.

Barthes' semiotic studies highlight that the meaning of a text or narrative does not stand alone, but rather lives and changes according to cultural traditions and the daily experiences of society (Jadou & Ghabra, 2021). It emphasized that the meaning of a text is not singular, but rather the result of a meeting between the text and the reader's life experiences and culture through: 1) Denotative meaning, namely the visual meaning or real phenomena captured by the senses. 2) Connotative meaning is formed from cultural construction, thus creating a shift in value or meaning of a term, and 3) Myths are meanings that are deeply rooted in the minds of society, so they are an important key in interpreting a message.

This research aims to deconstruct semiotic signs of maternal authority and sacrifice and identify the main character's dominant communication orientations through a multi-level semiotic analysis. The results of the semiotic analysis are integrated into Family Communication Pattern theory to broadly identify the primary communication orientations. Meanwhile, the single-mother framework is employed to explain the sociological aspects influencing these patterns.

This research goes beyond a superficial overview of the portrayal of mothers in the media, focusing instead on the underlying

reasons for the emergence of these specific communication patterns. The face of modern Indonesia is inseparable from the influence of ethnic identity, media representation, and the ways in which society adapts daily. Drawing on communication theory and semiotic analysis, this research is designed to produce a practical guide that can be immediately utilized by media professionals and academics. A significant finding of this research confirms that contemporary television programs have the power to drive change capable of dismantling outdated stigmas and fostering genuine public concern regarding the issue of single mothers.

RESEARCH METHOD

At its core, the qualitative-descriptive approach involves a holistic interpretation of phenomena based on direct observation in the field (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). When applied in film studies, this method enables an in-depth exploration of the meanings behind cinematic elements, without being bound by statistical data. The reality examined in such research shifts from real-life phenomena to a reality constructed through text and the visual representations displayed on screen. The researcher acts as the key instrument, observing and exploring the situation. The main objective of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena or symptoms by explaining the form of a clear description of the social phenomena or symptoms in the form of a series of words, which will ultimately produce a theory

(Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Focusing on the series *Induk Gajah* as its primary subject, this research explains how emotions and everyday verbal interactions influence the mother-child relationship aiming to explore how the deeply rooted ethical standards and communication culture of the Batak people are being reshaped by modern television.

Through a purposive sampling approach, data sources in qualitative methodology can be selectively determined by the researcher. This crucial step aims to obtain in-depth and meaningful data to address the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Following this approach, the initial step of this analysis involves re-watching the series in depth. Subsequently, six key scenes are identified as the most representative of the complex family dynamics. These moments were selected because they represent interaction dynamics that highlight maternal authority and the vulnerabilities inherent in single-parent families. The selected scenes are then analyzed through three integrated levels namely: 1) Micro Level: Using Barthes' semiotic framework, this research analyzes each scene through two stages of signification: denotation (the literal meaning of dialogue and visuals) and connotation (cultural values regarding maternal authority). This process reveals how the series reinforces or challenges the myth of the assertive Batak mother. 2) Macro level: The results of the semiotic analysis were then mapped to Family Communication Pattern Theory. This process identified the

dominant orientation, particularly one indicating a shift from a protective pattern to a consensual pattern. 3) Sociological contextualization: The transformation of these communication patterns is analyzed using Sara McLanahan's framework regarding single mothers, particularly to examine the roles of the patrilineal system and social vulnerability.

As a dynamic and iterative process, qualitative analysis involves the activities of data collection, data reduction, data display, and verification (Miles et al., 2020). The narrative structure of the *Induk Gajah* series is examined through four stages consisting of: 1) Data collection, the researcher analyzes several scenes focusing on maternal dominance and the negotiation process between mother and child by examining visual aspects and dialogue. 2) Data reduction, the large dataset was then summarized based on the family communication patterns framework, highlighting the dynamics of conversation orientation and conformity orientation within actual interactions. 3) Data display, the data were organized into a semiotic matrix to link visual signs (denotation), emotional nuances (connotation), and cultural myths associated with the Batak mother figure. 4) Conclusion and verification, the results of the sign analysis at the micro level are then linked to the broader sociological context, ensuring each observed communication shift was rigorously grounded across the six selected scenes. To ensure the trustworthiness of these qualitative findings, researchers used triangulation to

evaluate evidence from various data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This research employs source triangulation to ensure analytical rigor by juxtaposing media texts with expert perspectives in media communication, thereby interpreting the deconstruction of maternal authority within a cultural and communicative framework.

In qualitative research, when the object of research is a film, the research location shifts from a physical site in the real world to a textual or representational location within the film's cinematic space (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The research location in this research refers explicitly to a designated digital space where the media text is accessed and examined. The object of research is the television drama series *Induk Gajah* accessed and analyzed via the Prime Video platform to examine its visual and verbal elements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Induk Gajah is an entertaining Indonesian comedy-drama series that was adapted from a novel by Ira Gita Natalia Sembiring. To provide a context for the semiotic analysis that follows, the story is about a Batak single mother, Mamak Uli and her daughter, Ira's delicate relationship. The series portrays the heavy weight of cultural expectations around marriage and body image, and how patriarchal and patrilineal norms continue to impact contemporary Batak kinship. This research teases out these narrative threads to establish family communication patterns in the visual and verbal textures of characters' lives.

Denotation: in episode 1 (27:35), as seen as in figure 1, the dialogue '*sejam kau ga datang, meluncur aku*'. Ira is given a time limit by Mamak Uli to come home immediately. If it is not complied with, her office will be visited by



Source: *Induk Gajah Series*, 2023

Figure 1 Mamak Uli phoned Ira urgently, demanding her immediate return home in a threatening manner

Mamak Uli. Connotation: the word '*meluncur*' means to visit quickly, as a pressure without giving privacy. This pressure turns into a form of total control by limiting access, which ultimately takes away the child's freedom. Myth: The role of mothers in Batak society emphasizes firm authority and discipline in household management and children's education.

Such firmness aims to foster character development for success within cultural demands and to provide supervision for maintaining family stability.

The communication pattern in figure 1 confirms a very rigid protective approach with total compliance. Communication does not take place as an exchange of information but becomes a threat to discipline. Conversation orientation is low because communication is command-based, with threat '*meluncur*' as a conclusion to the conversation. Conformity orientation is high because Ira is not allowed to give reasons

and ultimately gives in. Role strain occurs when the double burden leads Mamak Uli to resort to threats as her preferred communication, as a form of authoritarianism to compensate for the absence of a husband and to maintain the family's reputation. Batak mothers tend to use invasive communication to keep their children within the reach of traditional and moral supervision. Mamak Uli is not portrayed as a weak figure, but as a very dominant one. Contemporary media is beginning to give space to single mothers to appear as empowered subjects, rather than objects of suffering (Rizzo, 2024).

Denotation: in episode 2 (04:53), in figure 2, the dialogue '*masa anak gadis badannya kayak Gajah*' is a form of verbal abuse but wrapped in affection. Connotation: The phrase '*anak gadis*' refers to Ira's unmarried status. The phrase '*gajah*' refers to a large body, which is not only a physical insult but also an expression of unworthiness. Unfortunately, women often



Source: *Induk Gajah* Series, 2023

Figure 2 Mamak Uli made derogatory comments regarding Ira's body weight, utilizing a metaphor comparing her to an elephant

feel pressured to meet the standards of beauty and ideal body shape that are shaped by their social environment. Myth: Mamak Uli suggests that women are expected to focus on their physical presentation, particularly in marriage preparation, within the context of Batak family structures and the emphasis on lineage continuation.

The communication pattern in figure 2 is invasive and protective, wherein the child's physical well-being is compromised in favor of attaining social validation through marriage. The conversation is low because Ira cannot argue back, as the dialogue is judgmental and demeaning. Conformity orientation is high because Ira is pressured to follow certain standards to face society's expectations. Socialization differences occur in an authoritarian form driven by the single mother's perception of societal surveillance; consequently, she prioritizes control and

behavioral standards to prevent her child from misbehaving. If Ira does not marry soon, society may attribute this to her parenting.

Her fate of becoming a widow and remaining single amidst the pressures of Batak customs demonstrates the same agency (Rizzo, 2024). Single mothers in the media feel compelled to prove they can discipline their children and create a complete family. This dialogue is also a manifestation of a single mother's anxiety because having a beautiful, slim daughter who is married within the Batak community is a way of raising the family's self-esteem and social position (*Hasangapon* values).

Denotation: in episode 6 (09:18-09:55), Mamak Uli pressures Ira and Marsel to formalize their marriage, but does not allow them to express their opinions, as seen as in figure 3. Connotation: Mamak Uli maintains that women must marry at the appropriate time, viewing the acceleration of marriage as



Source: *Induk Gajah* Series, 2023

Figure 3 Mamak Uli pressures Ira and Marsel to formalize their marriage

a strategy for maintaining familial reputation. However, her reluctance to consider her children's perspectives suggests that she subordinates their emotional needs to the social legality of marriage. Myth: Batak women are advised to marry at a productive age and must avoid being single over the age of thirty. According to Batak customary law, individuals are expected to marry within their ethnic group, while prohibitions exist against marrying within the same clan (*marga*), as this is considered a violation of exogamous rule.

The communication pattern in figure 3 is protective, where the parent-child relationship is depicted as a superior-subordinate relationship. Conversation is low because Ira and Marcel are not given space to express their opinions, depicting a power relation between the older and younger generations that can be negotiated. Conformity orientation is high because Ira and Marcel are submissive subjects who must obey

their parents' decisions. This scene shows that marriage is no longer a relationship between two people, but rather a representation of social success as portrayed in culture and the media. Role strain and socialization differences occur in an authoritarian environment because a single mother will feel anxious if postponing the wedding means prolonging the family's vulnerability. Marrying Ira serves as a mechanism for Mamak Uli to transfer her responsibilities to a husband. Living without a partner and ensuring that her child does not suffer the same fate in a patrilineal culture, Mamak Uli coercively imposes her will on her children without considering their perspective.

Denotation: in episode 7 (22:52), Ira expresses her feelings, but Mamak Uli responds harshly, saying, '*ya karena itu kau ga laku-laku*', as seen as in figure 4. Connotation: The phrase '*ga laku-laku*' symbolically treats women as commodities in a market that must be sold.



Source: *Induk Gajah* Series, 2023

Figure 4 Ira has a big argument with Mamak Uli

This illustrates that a woman's societal value remains predominantly contingent upon marital status. Mamak Uli's indignation stems from her frustration regarding her daughter's perceived failure to attain social validation. Myth: Mamak Uli's love is clouded by her fear of the social stigma attached to unmarried women, who are considered failures for violating cultural norms. This pressure stems from the desire of Batak parents to continue the family line (*Hagabeon* values) and maintain the family's honor. Ira's action of refusing to be married is considered to be against tradition (Sutorini et al., 2019).

The communication pattern in figure 4 is protective, where compliance is paramount. Conversation is low because it is resolved through a one-way verbal attack, as Mamak Uli refuses to listen to Ira's reasons. The level of conformity is high because stemmed from the pressure put on Ira to follow community and family standards without being given

any freedom. Role strain and socialization differences arise because psychological pressure is experienced by Mamak Uli as a single mother from the dual responsibilities carried and the social stigma faced if her child is not married off. Anxiety is manifested in this behavior due to social marginalization, which forces Mamak Uli to adapt to authoritarian behavior. Consequently, the socio-cultural pressure inherent to her status as a single Batak mother compels her to adopt a stringent disciplinary approach to ensure Ira's adherence to traditional customs.

Denotation: in episode 7 (38:16), Mamak Uli expressed her concern about Ira's future with a change in tone '*Mamak ga mau kau sendirian Inang*' as social vulnerability, as seen as in figure 5. Connotation: This dialogue reflects Mamak Uli's concern about stigma and her worries about the status of women without partners. The use of the term '*Inang*' mitigates conflict by softening the message. Mamak Uli



Source: *Induk Gajah* Series, 2023

Figure 5 An increased understanding of Ira has led to a shift in Mamak Uli's attitude

wants Ira to uphold social values because being single is considered a failure for women of her generation. The phrase '*sendirian*' refers to the lack of social and legal protection that is usually obtained through marriage. Myth: A Batak woman will lose her protection if she does not rely on a man (husband). Mamak Uli believes that being single is a tragedy, not an autonomous choice, because parents want their children to find a partner who can accompany them in their future life.

The communication pattern in figure 5 changes from protective to consensual because both parties are willing to engage. The audience is presented with a picture of wounded love, wrapped in intergenerational conflict but with a desire to protect. The conversation is intense because Mamak Uli begins to open about her feelings and shares her emotions with Ira. Conformity is still strong because of the many societal pressures on Ira to live up to expectations of her community and family a dynamic that severely limits her autonomy. Role strain is reduced because when emotional burdens are revealed, the burden of motherhood becomes lighter as an authoritative pattern. However, the gentleness in her tone stems from the sociological trauma of being a single mother. The happiness of parents will certainly be realized when all family members feel happy, and vice versa. This can affect the dynamics of a household. Loneliness is not only an emotional sentiment but also a reflection of the vulnerability of women's position in the Batak

traditional structure without a male partner. Mamak Uli has experienced the hardships of living alone in a patriarchal society and seeks to prevent Ira from experiencing a similar fate.

Denotation: As shown in figure 6 (02:38–02:4), Mamak Uli delegates the final decision to Ira in episode 8, stating, '*boleh ya Nang, tapi kali ini kau yang putuskan*'. Connotation: There is a shift from the image of an authoritarian mother to a democratic mother. The phrase '*boleh ya, Nang*' shows that Mamak Uli is still unsure. However, she tries not to control it so that Ira feels valued. Meanwhile, the phrase '*kau yang putuskan*' means giving autonomy to the child. Myth: In the Batak culture, a mother begins to position her daughter as a friend when the child is considered mature and capable of shouldering family responsibilities. Daughters are usually closest to their mothers. This is because they often do household chores together, and mothers pass on family customs and values to their daughters.

Ultimately, this story experiences a shift in communication towards respect for each other's opinions, as the pressure to always comply with parental wishes decreases. Mamak Uli demonstrates more mature affection by giving Ira the freedom to make her own decisions. When a family lowers its conformity orientation, the pressure to comply with parental authority also decreases. Parents begin to value their children's independence and personal space to make their own decisions. The heightened dialogic intensity reflects a meaningful shift toward a high



Source: *Induk Gajah* Series, 2023

Figure 6 Mamak Uli gives Ira freedom

conversation orientation. From this perspective, the opinions of all family members are valued. Decisions are no longer imposed by parents upon their children but emerge from discussions based on equality and mutual respect. This shift is very common as children grow into adulthood. Parents, specifically mothers, begin to redefine their affection as a form of support for their child's autonomy.

That openness to ethnic and background differences is part of cultural evolution is demonstrated through the deconstruction of conventional values in the reasons for not being Batak. The aspiration to arrange a suitable marriage for her child is maintained by Mamak Uli; her efforts are represented by a strategic compromise that has been evolved into a collaborative process, where autonomy in the decision-making process is ultimately granted

to the child. As a single mother, trying to control everything is exhausting. Ultimately, Mamak Uli had to let go of some control to keep the family together. Giving Ira decision-making authority was a way to finally breathe a sigh of relief after carrying this burden alone.

The series concludes with Mamak Uli's decision to reconcile and support Ira and Marsels marriage. The family dispute is resolved through empathy and compromise between family members. While such instant resolutions are rare in real life which often require a lengthy process, Mamak Uli still represents the ideal mother figure who upholds family values, leaving viewers satisfied with the ending.

Affection in this series is not merely voiced but manifests through profound emotional dynamics, that reflect Batak cultural identity. This series also captures the modern reality of

how parenting trends and social media have become a new burden for mothers, driven by the emergence of overly perfect and unrealistic parenting standards (Heffernan & Wilgus, 2018). Indonesian popular culture frequently traps the representation of motherhood within an ideology of maternalism, where self-sacrifice is viewed as an absolute requirement (Priyatna et al., 2020; Triastuti et al., 2026).

Micro-semiotic analysis examines the mother's power dynamics at the level of denotation through how she manages emotions. This meaning extends to the level of connotation, where the mother figure embodies a symbol of protection, affection, and total responsibility. Ironically, within the realm of myth, a mother's boundless self-sacrifice is often demanded as a moral obligation, a requirement that, often unconsciously, serves to perpetuate the patriarchal system. Through narratives that are constantly reproduced, society is ultimately led to believe that sacrifice and steadfastness are absolute duties that a mother must shoulder. By mapping these semiotic insights onto the family communication pattern model, it becomes clear that the initial phase of representation is rooted in a protective-authoritarian style. Batak single mothers adopt disciplined child-rearing due to limited patrilineal support, protecting children from stigma and promiscuity. Such protectiveness is also intended to uphold the values of *Hasangapon* (honor), *Hamoraon* (wealth), and *Hagabeon* (descent) within their community (Sari et al., 2018). Mamak Uli

raised her daughter with a blend of firmness and affection, aiming to uphold her honor and secure her future.

As the story unfolds, the mother-child relationship dynamics in the series undergo a touching transformation. Initially stiff and one-sided, their communication gradually evolves into a mutually respectful, two-way dialogue. This shift is toward a consensual-authoritative relationship grounded primarily in mutual understanding. The change in the mother's tone signals a transition from one-way command to collaboration through discussion. This proves the argument that Family Communication Pattern theory is flexible and adaptable to specific situations. Meanwhile, theories regarding single-parent families help in understanding changes in communication. The shift toward a consensual-authoritative style indicates that mothers are intentionally adjusting their communication method.

Maintaining family harmony should be achieved through strong emotional bonds. Interestingly, the series portrays a mother's authority not as innate, but rather as the result of negotiation within her surroundings. The television industry is shifting stereotypes regarding mothers from specific ethnic groups, as seen in *Induk Gajah*. The initial perception of the Batak mother as a rigid and authoritarian figure is gradually dispelled. The filmmaker aims to show how the mother uses communication to remain resilient and maintain control amidst difficult circumstances. This dynamic is also

linked to the fact that parents hold absolute authority within the Batak family. Such cultural conventions indirectly position senior women as the family's central axis, managing the household through a distinctive speaking style to uphold norms of togetherness. This situation caused Mamak Uli's authority to transform into a form of power that was culturally accepted while the burden resulting from role strain and unequal socialization further exacerbated the issue. She tightened protective measures to protect Ira from social stigmatization, which would further threaten her vulnerable status as a single mother without a father figure to balance her authority. Single mothers shoulder the entire burden of child-rearing alone, working not only to support their families but also to ensure their children have a safe environment for their growth and development (Nazaruk et al., 2026). Mamak Uli's success in educating Ira and supporting her career as a journalist. As a child, Ira was their hope and most precious treasure, and the mother's success in raising a child who adheres to tradition is a form of socialization difference, as daughters in Batak families reflect happiness for their parents and balance in life. Daughters are expected to become valuable, wise individuals who bring joy to the family. The values of equality and respect for girls are upheld through parenting and education, so that they become useful individuals.

The arranged marriage storyline at the heart of this series embodies the values of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, particularly the effort to preserve tradition

and strengthen extended family ties. Within a patrilineal structure, this practice reinforces male dominance and limits women's autonomy in choosing their own partners (Saraswati et al., 2026).

Cultural adherence, especially to marital norms, is shaped by the personal trauma Mamak Uli endured in preserving the family's reputation. This leads to a way of talking that is too controlling and has unrealistic expectations, which can lead to toxic parenting. Nevertheless, as a Batak woman, Mamak Uli instilled traditional values and their significance in Ira, while also ensuring their preservation through explanations, setting an example, and shared experiences. This series shows that communication is not only an exchange of messages, but also an effort to manage traditional reputation. The prominent use of Batak cultural symbols in this series, such as the Batak language, traditional forms of address, the presentation of Ulos at Ira and Marsel's wedding, and the practice of *Dalihan Na Tolu* enables family communication to foster a shared, ongoing sense of meaning (Zulkarnain et al., 2026). At the beginning of the story, role strain leads Mamak Uli to communicate protectively, speaking in a low conversation and high conformity, demanding that Ira obey the rules set by Batak tradition with minimal discussion because Mamak Uli is afraid of being considered a failure in fulfilling the myth of the ideal Batak mother. The patriarchal values ingrained in society, embodied by Mamak Uli as

a wife and mother, will reduce social sanctions if her child is successful.

However, changes occurred as social pressure decreased and the relationship between mother and child improved. Role strain gradually decreased, allowing for more open communication. Mamak Uli began to give Ira more space by improving her previously rigid communication style. Despite the stigma attached to single mothers, Mamak Uli was able to demonstrate her resilience in managing her family life (Febriyanti et al., 2020). There was a shift in communication patterns toward a consensual approach characterized by high conversation and high conformity, where Mamak Uli became more open to dialogue and negotiation based on feelings, needs, and shared decisions as a reconfiguration of emotional management within the family relationship. Socialization differences occur because Mamak Uli positions Ira as a substitute for the family's pride in the absence of a husband, so a consensual pattern is used to ensure that Ira understands her burden while still obeying traditional rules. The family communication pattern is dynamic because generational changes influence it, and parents adapt to their children's needs.

The results of this research are supported by the views of a media communication expert who explains:

The applied layered analysis design demonstrates excellent epistemological consistency and analytical rigor. The integration of semiotics and Family Communication Patterns theory is consistently executed to elucidate the

communication relationship patterns structured through visual and verbal signs within the series. The research reinforces its causal validity by incorporating the sociological realities of single motherhood. The shift from protective-authoritarian pattern to a consensual-authoritative represents a highly conscious response. Batak families are currently adapting to structural challenges and the demands of customary practices that have long been characterized by the rigidity of patrilineal tradition. What is interesting about this research is its key findings, particularly regarding communication within inter-ethnic families and how this is portrayed in the media. Furthermore, the use of a multi-level analysis approach renders the results far more in-depth and accurate (Informant, personal communication, January 12, 2026).

This research confirms previous studies that suggest that Mamak Uli's authority represents a single mother's adaptation (Supratman, 2018), characterized as a survival strategy in which social pressures trigger an initially authoritarian communication pattern. As the story unfolds, a new equilibrium is achieved through a dialectic shifting this dynamic toward a more consensual pattern (Hanifah et al., 2023)

CONCLUSION

The *Induk Gajah* series highlights the family dynamics of a Batak single mother and illustrates the evolution of her communication style. This approach constitutes a form of resistance against patriarchal culture and the stigma of social vulnerability. The multilevel analysis used in this research indicates that media encourages parents to adapt to a more flexible communication style. This research

extends Family Communication Patterns Theory by examining the culture and lives of single mothers as frequently portrayed on Indonesian television. This indicates that family interactions continue to change with the times while also serving as a foundation for future research on ethnic representation and spaces for family discussion in the digital era. However, this research is limited by a textual analysis focused on only a single series, which restricts its generalizability and lacks empirical data on women lived experiences. Therefore, for future research, it is recommended to analyze maternal communication styles in greater depth using a broader range of methods. It is important for examining the extent to which social structures within society influence current patterns of interaction. Secondly, future research could analyze other cultures that practice a matrilineal kinship system. This approach could help determine whether the shift toward authoritative and consensual patterns is a widespread contemporary trend or a distinctive characteristic of specific cultures. Third, it is necessary to study how over-the-top (OTT) streaming platforms influence ethnic women's narratives so that we can distinguish between global digital trends and specific cultural shifts. Fourth, for practitioners in family counseling and media literacy, these insights offer practical references for designing interventions that address the complexities of modern family life. It is important to emphasize that open communication and negotiation of authority,

as demonstrated in the transition to consensual patterns, are key to maintaining the psychosocial well-being of single families under the pressure of social stigma and rigid traditional demands. This research demonstrates that applying the Family Communication Pattern theory within a non-Western patrilineal culture yields new insights. The findings reveal how exposure to digital media narratives can drive changes in the mother's role in decision-making and strengthen family resilience. This insight underpins various practical recommendations for family counselors and media literacy practitioners in supporting the adaptation of modern families. Ultimately, bridging these findings with future empirical, cross-cultural, and platform-specific investigations will provide a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary family communication dynamics.

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AI declaration: Generative AI tools were used only for using GPT Chat, Google Gemini for text writing and QuillBot for checking grammar.

Ethical clearance: This research did not involve human participants, interviews, or the collection of personal data. The research focused on the analysis of a publicly accessible television series (*Induk Gajah*, 2023) as a media and cultural text. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring that all interpretations remained at

the level of representation and communication patterns, without attributing psychological conditions or personal intentions to real individuals. The analysis was conducted with cultural sensitivity toward Batak women and single mothers to avoid stigmatization and misrepresentation.

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