

## THE REPRESENTATION OF TABAYYUN AS AN ISLAMIC COMMUNICATION ETHIC IN THE FILM TABAYYUN (2025)

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**Abstract :** The rapid proliferation of unverified information in contemporary social life has elevated the urgency of ethical communication practices grounded in Islamic values. This study investigates the representation of tabayyun as an Islamic communication ethic within the Indonesian religious drama film Tabayyun (2025). The concept of tabayyun, rooted in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6, refers to the deliberate verification of information prior to judgment or action. Employing a qualitative methodology with content analysis, this research systematically examines scenes, dialogues, and visual symbols to trace how tabayyun is constructed and communicated through cinematic narrative. Three principal findings emerge: first, the film illustrates how the absence of tabayyun generates prejudice and social stigma; second, it portrays tabayyun as an active communicative process demanding courage and moral accountability; and third, it demonstrates that sustained practice of tabayyun facilitates conflict resolution and relational reconciliation. This study affirms that tabayyun operates not merely as a religious norm but as a transformative mechanism of ethical communication relevant to contemporary social challenges.

**Keywords:** Tabayyun, Islamic Communication Ethics, Film Representation, Content Analysis, Conflict Resolution

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## Introduction

Contemporary social life is increasingly characterized by the accelerated flow of information through digital networks, a phenomenon that has fundamentally restructured the dynamics of human communication. Within this environment, individuals are exposed to an unprecedented volume of information, much of which remains unverified or contextually distorted before being received, accepted, and shared. The structural shift in communication patterns from linear, source-to-receiver transmission toward multidirectional and network-based exchanges has intensified the risk of disinformation, misinterpretation, and interpersonal conflict (Wahyudi Marpaung & Mailin, 2025). As a consequence, the quality of social communication can no longer be evaluated solely on the basis of the content or clarity of messages transmitted; rather, it must also be assessed by the degree to which individuals exercise discernment, critical evaluation, and ethical accountability in processing the information they encounter.

This communicative predicament finds a compelling normative response in the Islamic concept of *tabayyun*, which refers to the deliberate and careful process of seeking clarity and verification before forming judgments or disseminating information. As a fundamental principle of Islamic communication ethics, *tabayyun* encapsulates values of prudence, intellectual honesty, and moral responsibility in interpersonal and social interaction. Scholars have affirmed that Islamic communication is not merely instrumental but fundamentally ethical in character, founded upon Quranic principles that emphasize the sanctity of truthful, dignified, and responsible speech as the basis of harmonious social life (Sukmaningtyas et al., 2024). Complementing this view, Abdullah and Kahina (2022) assert that the values of Islamic communication are grounded in a moral framework designed to preserve social cohesion and to prevent misunderstanding from eroding relational integrity. The normative foundation of *tabayyun* is most explicitly articulated in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6, which commands believers to verify information received from an unreliable source, lest they act upon ignorance and subsequently incur regret.

The theoretical architecture of this study rests on two interrelated frameworks. The first concerns Islamic communication ethics, understood as a coherent system of values governing how messages should be formulated, transmitted, and received within the moral compass of the Quran and the Prophetic tradition (Susanto, 2016). Central to this framework is the imperative that communication must be truthful, intentional, and free from the corrupting influences of prejudice, rumor, and unexamined assumption. M. Quraish Shihab, in *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, elaborates that the command for *tabayyun* implies an active, conscious engagement with information, a responsibility to seek knowledge rather than to react from a state of ignorance or *jahalah* (Shihab, 2002). The second theoretical framework pertains to film as a medium of social representation. Scholars have argued that cinema does not merely reflect social reality but actively constructs and mediates it through carefully selected narrative choices, visual compositions, and symbolic registers (Widya Priastuty et al.,

2023). Without an ethical foundation, communication risks being misappropriated as a vehicle for manipulation and the dissemination of falsehood (Widayanthi & Wulandari, 2025).

The scholarly conversation on tabayyun has been advancing steadily across multiple domains. Setiawan (2021) examined its significance as a mechanism for conflict resolution within Indonesia's multicultural society, concluding that the cultivation of openness and the active search for factual clarity can prevent disputes from escalating into entrenched social antagonism. From a different vantage point, Efendi et al. (2023) explored tabayyun in relation to Islamic media management in the digital era, arguing that it constitutes an ethical imperative that safeguards the accuracy of religious communication and mitigates the social harms associated with unverified content. While these contributions are valuable, they address tabayyun primarily within the domains of social behavior and digital media practice, leaving unexamined how this concept is narratively and visually represented within film, a gap that motivates the present study.

The film selected as the object of this study is *Tabayyun* (2025), an Indonesian religious drama directed by Key Mangunsong and adapted from a novel by Ilyas Bachtiar. The narrative centers on Zalina, portrayed by Titi Kamal, a single mother navigating social pressures arising from prejudice and unilateral moral judgment within her professional and personal environments. The dramatic tension intensifies when Arlo, the son of her employer, develops romantic feelings for her, provoking familial resistance. The ensuing process of tabayyun, an act of deliberate clarification, ultimately brings suppressed truths to light and initiates a profound transformation in the perspectives of all parties involved (Cyntara, 2025). The film is analytically significant because it explicitly dramatizes both the destructive consequences of the absence of tabayyun and the transformative power of its practice.

This study aims to analyze how tabayyun is represented as an Islamic communication ethic within the film *Tabayyun* (2025), and to examine how the film constructs tabayyun as a communicative process capable of transforming prejudice into understanding and fostering social reconciliation. The findings are intended to enrich Islamic communication studies, particularly as they pertain to the representation of ethical values in popular media, and to offer a practically applicable framework for understanding the critical importance of information verification in contemporary social life.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research paradigm employing content analysis as its principal methodological approach. Content analysis is recognized as a systematic and objective method for examining communicative messages across diverse media forms, enabling researchers to draw replicable and valid inferences from texts or other meaningful materials based on their contextual use (Krippendorff, 2018). Within media studies, this method is well-suited to identifying, categorizing, and interpreting

the thematic, symbolic, and narrative dimensions of cinematic content, and has been established as a rigorous tool for studying communication variables embedded in mediated texts (Pratama et al., 2021).

The primary data source is the film *Tabayyun* (2025), selected for its explicit thematic engagement with the concept and its rich repository of analytically relevant scenes, dialogues, and visual elements. The unit of analysis encompasses dialogue exchanges, narrative sequences, character interactions, and symbolic visual representations bearing relevance to the practice or absence of *tabayyun*. Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and prior studies on Islamic communication ethics. Media texts are understood not as neutral reflections of reality but as active constructions shaped by processes of cultural selection and semiotic signification (Wibowo, 2019). Data collection was conducted through repeated and systematic viewings of the film, supplemented by comprehensive documentary review. Relevant scenes were identified, transcribed, and annotated, then organized into three analytical categories: the absence of *tabayyun* and its effects; the active practice of *tabayyun* through clarification; and the outcomes of *tabayyun* in conflict resolution. Validity was secured through theoretical triangulation, cross-referencing findings with multiple theoretical perspectives and prior studies to ensure interpretive consistency (Rasyid, 2022).

## **Results and Discussion**

A systematic content analysis of *Tabayyun* (2025) reveals that the film constructs the concept of *tabayyun* as an Islamic communication ethic through three interconnected and sequentially organized thematic dimensions. These dimensions collectively trace a communicative trajectory from conflict to resolution, demonstrating how *tabayyun* functions as an ethically grounded and practically transformative mechanism within human social relations.

### **Prejudice and Social Stigma as Consequences of the Absence of Tabayyun**

The first major finding is the film's sustained and layered representation of social prejudice and stigma as direct consequences of the failure to practice *tabayyun*. Rather than being depicted as isolated individual attitudes, prejudice is portrayed as a collective and cumulative communicative phenomenon that intensifies across multiple social contexts, all converging on the character of Zalina. This representational strategy illustrates how the absence of information verification does not merely distort individual judgments but propagates through social networks, accumulating in layers that become progressively difficult to dislodge. This condition directly reflects what Islamic communication ethics identifies as *jahalalah*, namely action grounded in ignorance or unverified information (Shihab, 2002).

The first layer of this representational architecture manifests in a sequence of gossip scenes set within the workplace. These scenes unfold across three distinct but interconnected stages. In the initial stage, four coworkers who witness a conversation between Zalina and Arlo immediately construct a negative interpretation: that Zalina

has deliberately orchestrated after-hours interaction with Arlo to cultivate a romantic opportunity. This moment captures the epistemic failure at the heart of *tabayyun's* absence, the hasty conversion of surface observation into moral judgment without any inquiry into the underlying reality.

**Figure 1. Coworkers gossiping after witnessing the conversation between Zalina and Arlo**



The second stage deploys a striking cinematic technique: gossip is represented through a soundless visual in which three employees are shown whispering in the background of the frame. The deliberate silencing of their speech constructs gossip not merely as morally problematic content but as a fundamentally covert and evasive communicative form, one that is structurally incompatible with the transparency and directness required by *tabayyun*. The third stage depicts a larger group of employees openly impugning Zalina's character and social eligibility, dismissing her as a divorced single mother whose past renders her unworthy of Arlo. The escalation from whispered conjecture to explicit social disqualification vividly illustrates how undisciplined communication, left unchallenged by verification, compounds upon itself.

**Figure 2. Employees gossiping as silhouettes in the background without sound**



**Figure 3. Employees gossiping about Arum and Zalina**

These communicative behaviors are normatively antithetical to the Quranic prohibition in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 12, which commands believers to guard themselves against unwarranted suspicion and forbids backbiting. Ibn Kathir's commentary clarifies that this verse targets not only overt defamation but also the internal disposition of harboring unsubstantiated suspicion, since such dispositions inevitably externalize into harmful communicative acts (Kathir, 2003). Within Islamic psychology, this disposition, known as *su'udzan*, is understood as a spiritually corrosive attitude that generates a cascade of social pathologies including backbiting, envy, and resentment, all of which erode communal trust (Rusydi, 2012). These three stages collectively demonstrate that gossip is not a singular moral lapse but a progressive communicative pattern that begins with private assumption and culminates in collective public stigmatization.

The second layer of prejudice centers on the character of Arlo's mother, who, upon learning of the developing relationship between her son and Zalina, instantly pronounces Zalina to be of uncertain origin and unacceptable background, denying her even the minimal courtesy of a hearing. Her judgment is formed not from evidence but from social assumption grounded in class consciousness. This depiction aligns with the psychological understanding of prejudice as an emotionally conditioned negative attitude that bypasses rational inquiry in favor of categorical dismissal (Gismin & Mansyur, 2018). Significantly, it is Arlo who voices the film's most explicit invocation of *tabayyun* in this scene, urging his mother to seek the truth before rendering judgment. This utterance functions not merely as a line of dialogue but as a representational marker, signaling that the film consciously intends *tabayyun* to be understood as an ethical imperative within communicative relationships.

**Figure 4. Arlo's mother speaking to Arlo about Zalina**

The third and most complex layer of prejudice emerges in the three-way meeting involving Arlo, his mother, and Zalina. Although Zalina bravely discloses the full truth of her past and Arlo's mother's tears indicate that she has received and processed the factual content of this disclosure, her subsequent behavior reveals a critical distinction: having verified the facts, she nonetheless persists in stigmatizing Zalina on the basis of those same facts. This transition from ignorance to knowledge without a corresponding revision of prejudicial attitude demonstrates that *tabayyun*, understood as mere information acquisition, is insufficient. Genuine *tabayyun* must also entail a moral reckoning with the information received and a willingness to revise one's evaluative framework accordingly.

This behavioral dimension directly contravenes QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 11, which prohibits the derision and social devaluation of others, affirming that the one who is scorned may in fact be morally superior in the sight of God. Ibn Kathir underscores that this verse constitutes a comprehensive prohibition against all forms of human belittlement (Kathir, 2003). Arlo's mother's logic of social hierarchy stands in direct theological opposition to the Quranic concept of *al-musawah*, human equality before God, which holds that human dignity cannot be legitimately conditioned upon biographical circumstance but is universally inherent and must be socially actualized through the rejection of discrimination (Munawaroh et al., 2025; Rabbani & Kudhori, 2023).

**Figure 5. Zalina recounting her past before Arlo and his mother**

### Information Clarification and Honesty as the Essence of Tabayyun Practice

The second principal finding concerns the film's representation of *tabayyun* as an active and multilayered communicative practice enacted through processes of clarification and courageous truth-telling. This dimension shifts analytical focus to how the film portrays *tabayyun* as a conscious and demanding ethical choice made by characters in the face of communicative conflict. This representation unfolds across three analytically distinct but narratively interconnected layers.

The first layer features Arlo as the initiating agent of *tabayyun*. His explicit invocation of the term and insistence that truth must be sought before judgment is rendered encapsulates the active dimension of the concept as commanded in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 6. Al-Syawkani's classical commentary elaborates that *tabayyun* entails a practice of *tathabbut*, deliberate, unhurried, and epistemically careful examination of a situation until it becomes sufficiently clear to preclude any harmful or unjust action (Al-Syawkani, as cited in Meerangani et al., 2025). Shihab (2002) further emphasizes the active character of this command, noting that it requires the believer to earnestly pursue truth through careful investigation rather than passively awaiting clarification.

**Figure 6. Arlo speaking with his mother, calling for tabayyun**



The second layer centers on Zalina as the party whose willingness to disclose the full and unmediated truth about her past constitutes the heart of the *tabayyun* process. Despite the emotional weight of this disclosure, made in the presence of Arlo's mother who has already demonstrated hostility, Zalina chooses to speak openly and completely, withholding nothing of her history. This act of courageous truthfulness reflects the Quranic principle of *qaulan sadidan*, articulated in QS. Al-Ahzab [33]: 70 as the imperative to speak the truth. Shihab (2002) defines *qaulan sadidan* as speech that is truthful, apt, and morally upright, communication that does not deviate from reality and is delivered with integrity and accountability. As elaborated by Hulawa and Kasmia (2025), this principle encompasses five core virtues: truthfulness, gentleness, beneficial communication, justice, and humility, all of which are embodied in Zalina's act of disclosure. This cinematic moment represents the indispensable

complementarity between the party who requests clarity and the party who must supply it.

**Figure 7. Zalina honestly recounting her background**



The third and most intimate layer is represented through the relational reckoning between Arlo and his mother following the revelation of truth about his father. For years, Arlo had harbored unverified assumptions that his mother was responsible for his father's absence, assumptions born not from confirmed facts but from incomplete communication within the most intimate of relational bonds. The revelation dismantles these assumptions entirely and elicits from Arlo a profound expression of regret: he had failed to practice *tabayyun* even toward his own mother. This representational choice carries significant ethical weight, extending the moral scope of *tabayyun* beyond formal communicative contexts into the domain of intimate family relations. Meerangani et al. (2025) affirm that *tabayyun* requires careful and patient attention before acting on incomplete understanding, lest the resulting error cause irreparable harm and lasting regret. The scene culminates in mutual forgiveness, after which Arlo formally requests his mother's blessing for his union with Zalina, positioning *tabayyun* not only as an instrument of conflict prevention but as a pathway to the restoration of dignified relational bonds.

**Figure 8. Arlo and his mother crying together after the truth about the father is revealed**



Taken together, the three layers of this finding demonstrate that the film represents clarification and honesty not as simple individual acts but as demanding communicative processes requiring courage, humility, and a readiness from all parties to encounter truth, even when that truth is painful.

### **Conflict Resolution as the Outcome of Tabayyun Practice**

The third and culminating thematic dimension concerns the role of *tabayyun* in achieving conflict resolution and interpersonal reconciliation. The film is notably careful not to represent this resolution as instantaneous; instead, it portrays the process as gradual, multilayered, and contingent upon the sustained openness of all parties. Setiawan (2021) has established that *tabayyun* possesses considerable potential as a framework for social conflict resolution precisely because it clarifies the sources of misunderstanding while simultaneously cultivating the ethical dispositions, including humility, empathy, and moral accountability, necessary for sustainable reconciliation.

The first layer of resolution is represented in the encounter between Arlo's mother and Bu Tiwi at the orphanage. Having learned the full details of Zalina's past, Arlo's mother seeks out Bu Tiwi to express her frustration. Bu Tiwi's response, delivered with composure and warmth, reframes the conversation by gently suggesting that the source of resistance lies not in Zalina's history but in Arlo's mother's own unresolved relationship with her past. Her counsel is accompanied by a tender gesture, a soft touch on the shoulder, that reinforces the verbal message with embodied compassion. This communicative sequence exemplifies the Quranic concept of *mauizhah hasanah* as articulated in QS. An-Nahl [16]: 125, counsel delivered with wisdom and gentleness, designed not to overwhelm or condemn but to open the heart of the recipient to deeper self-reflection. Shihab (2002) glosses *mauizhah hasanah* as advice offered with love and tenderness, designed to penetrate the defensive barriers of the listener and invite genuine inner change. Although Bu Tiwi's counsel does not produce an immediate transformation, it plants a seed of moral insight that subsequently germinates through further communicative encounters, a choice that reflects the film's understanding of moral change as inherently gradual.

**Figure 9. Bu Tiwi gently pats the shoulder of Arlo's mother while offering advice**



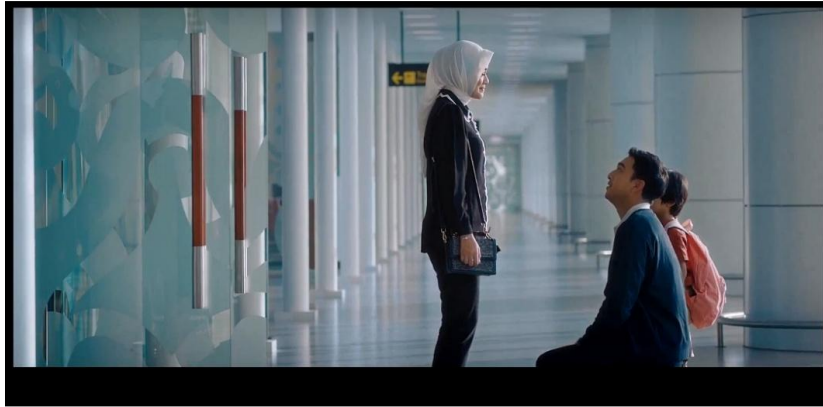
The second layer of resolution emerges in the scene where Arlo and his mother engage in the honest reckoning their relationship had long deferred. The revelation that Arlo's father had abandoned the family voluntarily shatters the false narrative Arlo had internalized. His sincere apology for years of unverified judgment, combined with his mother's expressed desire for his happiness, creates a moment of profound mutual understanding and relational repair. Critically, Arlo articulates an insight that proves decisive: Zalina is a person whose life has already been saturated with pain, and deliberately adding to that pain is something he is constitutionally unable to do. This appeal repositions Zalina not as a subject of social evaluation but as a fellow human being deserving of empathy, a reorientation that finally breaks through his mother's resistance and moves her to grant her blessing. The transformation in Arlo's mother's disposition is depicted not as the product of a single revelatory moment but as the accumulation of multiple communicative experiences: Zalina's honest self-disclosure, Bu Tiwi's wise counsel, and Arlo's emotionally grounded appeal to shared human vulnerability.

**Figure 10. Arlo and his mother embracing after she grants her blessing**



The third and symbolic layer of resolution arrives in the airport scene, where Arlo intercepts Zalina as she prepares to depart for Bali and formally proposes to her. After a contemplative silence in which she appears to revisit the full arc of her experiences, Zalina accepts. The airport setting, a site of departure and new beginnings, carries powerful symbolic resonance: it suggests that the completion of *tabayyun* does not merely restore a prior state of affairs but inaugurates an entirely new chapter founded on truth, understanding, and hard-won mutual acceptance.

**Figure 11. Arlo proposing to Zalina at the airport; Arka stands beside him**



Taken together, the three layers of conflict resolution affirm the central argument that *tabayyun*, when practiced with consistency, moral courage, and relational sensitivity, possesses the capacity to transform the trajectory of human communication from one driven by prejudice and misunderstanding to one guided by clarity, empathy, and reconciliation. This substantiates Setiawan's (2021) contention that the most significant social contribution of *tabayyun* lies in its capacity to cultivate a communicative ethic grounded in Islamic values that ultimately promotes more peaceful, dignified, and humanly enriching social life.

### Conclusion

This study analyzed how *tabayyun* is represented as an Islamic communication ethic within the film *Tabayyun* (2025). The findings, derived from systematic qualitative content analysis, reveal that the film constructs *tabayyun* as a multidimensional communicative principle operating across three analytically distinct yet narratively integrated thematic registers.

The first dimension demonstrates that the absence of *tabayyun* generates prejudice and social stigma that are not merely personal but structurally propagated through social networks. From workplace gossip to familial rejection grounded in social hierarchy, the film depicts how unverified judgment accumulates and hardens into stigma, a communicative pathology that the Islamic tradition explicitly condemns through the prohibitions in QS. Al-Hujurat [49]: 12 against suspicion and backbiting, and the Prophetic warnings against *su'udzan*.

The second dimension reveals that the practice of *tabayyun* demands active moral engagement from all parties. Arlo's explicit invocation of *tabayyun* as an ethical command, Zalina's courageous enactment of *qaulan sadidan* through full and honest self-disclosure, and Arlo's reckoning with his own failure to seek clarity within his most intimate relational bond collectively demonstrate that *tabayyun* is not a passive reception of information but a demanding ethical practice requiring courage, intellectual humility, and relational accountability.

The third dimension establishes that *tabayyun*, when sustained with patience and moral sensitivity, produces genuine conflict resolution and relational reconciliation. The gradual transformation of Arlo's mother, achieved not through coercion but through the cumulative effect of honest disclosure, wise counsel in the spirit of *mauizhah hasanah*, and empathetic moral appeal, exemplifies the film's most significant ethical argument: that enduring reconciliation requires communicative conditions in which all parties feel both compelled and safe to encounter the truth.

In its totality, *Tabayyun* (2025) represents *tabayyun* not as a static religious norm or a narrowly procedural act of verification, but as a living and transformative communicative ethic capable of reshaping the interpersonal and social relational landscape. The film's most enduring contribution lies in its capacity to demonstrate, through the medium of popular cinema, that *tabayyun* is not merely a prescription for individual moral hygiene but a systemic communicative practice with the power to heal fractured social bonds, restore human dignity, and cultivate the conditions for a more just and compassionate communal life. Future research may fruitfully extend these findings by examining the representation of *tabayyun* across a comparative corpus of Islamic media texts, or by exploring the reception of such representations among diverse audience communities.

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