



Qawlan Karīman in Tafsir Al-Azhar: Communication Ethics Foundation for Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the concept of *qawlan karīman* in Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 based on *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by Hamka and to examine its relevance as a foundation for communication ethics among Generation Z in the digital era. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design. Primary data were obtained from Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 and its interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, while secondary data were derived from contemporary literature on digital communication and Generation Z. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques to identify ethical communication values contained within the exegetical text. The findings indicate that *qawlan karīman* encompasses values of verbal politeness, respect for human dignity, emotional self-control, refinement of character, and social moral awareness. From Hamka's perspective, the nobility of speech is not merely related to word choice but reflects inner quality and moral education. These values demonstrate significant relevance within the context of Generation Z's digital communication, which is characterized by intense online interaction, rapid expression, and potential verbal conflict. This study concludes that *qawlan karīman* can be formulated as a model of digital communication ethics grounded in Qur'anic values, emphasizing moral responsibility, respect for others, and awareness of the social impact of communication. The concept contributes theoretically to the development of Islamic communication ethics studies and practically to strengthening value-based digital literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the fundamental aspects of human social interaction. From an Islamic perspective, the Qur'an emphasizes the importance of communication ethics through the principle of *qawlan karīman*, meaning "noble speech." Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 stresses that children should speak to their parents with gentle, polite, and respectful words, and avoid harsh expressions such as saying "ah" or speaking rudely. This principle is not limited to the family context but also serves as a universal moral guideline for fostering harmonious social relationships. Recent studies on Qur'anic communication ethics also show that *qawlan karīman* remains relevant as a normative basis for ethical communication in contemporary society (Sukmaningtyas et al., 2024; Kholilah, 2025).

The phenomenon of communication among Generation Z shows significant changes compared to previous generations. Recent literature generally positions Generation Z as those born after 1995 and raised fully within a digitally mediated environment, which explains why they are widely associated with the characteristics of digital or mobile natives (Fu et al., 2024; Rosenberg, 2025). This generation has grown up alongside the internet, social media, and mobile communication technologies, making digital platforms central to their social interactions and identity construction (Pramudya, 2025; Putri et al., 2025).

Generation Z's communication patterns tend to be fast, concise, visual, and platform-based. The intensity of social media use not only influences their communication style but also shapes their social identity and interaction patterns. In the Indonesian context, recent studies indicate that communication dynamics among Generation Z on social media are often marked by challenges such as hate speech, cyberbullying, privacy violations, impulsive expression, and the weakening of digital empathy, which underscores the urgent need for stronger ethical guidance in online interaction (Aulia & Ramadhani, 2024; Saputro, 2025).

Academically, studies on Generation Z's communication ethics have been widely conducted from the perspectives of communication studies and media sociology. However, many of these studies still focus on empirical-contemporary dynamics and have not fully integrated Qur'anic ethical values as a normative framework. On the other hand, studies of Qur'anic communication ethics in recent scholarship confirm that concepts such as *qawlan karīman* can be contextualized within modern communication challenges, including digital interaction and social media ethics (Sukmaningtyas et al., 2024; Alfriani et al., 2025). In *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Hamka emphasizes that noble speech reflects noble character and purity of heart in social interaction; therefore, his interpretation remains important as the primary exegetical reference in this study.





Based on this research gap, the principle of *qawlan karīman* becomes relevant to be examined as a foundation for communication ethics for Generation Z. This study aims to describe the content of Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23, analyze Hamka's interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* regarding the communication values contained within it, and examine its relevance to Generation Z's communication practices in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Type

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on exploring the meaning, values, and construction of communication ethics contained in Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 and its interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Recent methodological literature explains that qualitative research is intended to understand complex social phenomena through interpretive and context-sensitive inquiry, making it appropriate for studies that emphasize meaning and values rather than measurement (Lim, 2024). In contemporary methodological discussion, qualitative research is also viewed as a flexible and reflexive strategy that requires researchers to remain aware of social context, positionality, and interpretive processes throughout the study (Ide & Beddoe, 2024).

The library research type was used because all data were obtained through the collection of relevant written sources. Recent work on qualitative document analysis emphasizes that documents and written texts can function as primary data sources and may be systematically analyzed to generate valid qualitative findings (Morgan, 2022). In this study, the analyzed sources include the Qur'anic text, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, and contemporary academic literature related to communication ethics and Generation Z. In the context of tafsir studies, this approach is also relevant because recent research has shown that library-based qualitative analysis can effectively integrate Qur'anic verses, exegetical interpretation, and contemporary conceptual frameworks in thematic studies of *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Affandi et al., 2024).

Data Sources

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data include Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 and its interpretation in *Tafsir Al-Azhar* by (Morgan, 2022). This tafsir was chosen because it represents an *adabi-ijtima'i* interpretative approach that is relevant to the modern social context.

Secondary data were obtained from scholarly journals, research reports, and academic books discussing digital communication ethics, characteristics of Generation Z, and the concept of digital citizenship within the last five years. Contemporary literature was used to ensure theoretical relevance to the dynamics of digital communication (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; Twenge, 2023).

Inclusion criteria for literature in this study included: (1) direct relevance to communication ethics or Generation Z; (2) scholarly sources published within the last five to ten years; and (3) publication in reputable journals or by credible international institutions.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through documentation studies by reading, reviewing, and classifying data from the Qur'anic text, tafsir works, and supporting scholarly literature. Documentation in qualitative research requires careful source recording and consistency in tracing references (Affandi et al., 2024).

In text-based research, documentation serves as the primary technique to extract meaningful units relevant to the research focus (Ide & Beddoe, 2024). Therefore, every quotation and interpretation was systematically recorded to maintain academic validity.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach is suitable as it allows researchers to extract communication ethics values from tafsir texts in a structured manner.

The analysis process involved several stages. First, data reduction by selecting tafsir passages directly related to the concept of *qawlan karīman*. Second, coding to identify units of meaning such as verbal politeness, respect, emotional self-control, and moral awareness. Third, categorization of codes into main themes of communication ethics. Fourth, interpretation by connecting these themes with contemporary digital communication theory.

In contemporary qualitative research, thematic analysis is viewed as a reflective and contextual method, rather than merely a technical procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Therefore, the interpretation of *qawlan karīman* values was conducted dialogically between the tafsir text and modern communication literature.



RESULT

Research Findings

Findings on the Meaning of *Qawlan Karīman* in Surah Al-Isrā' Verse 23.

Analysis of Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 shows that the phrase *qawlan karīman* consists of the words *qawlan* (speech) and *karīman* (noble). Semantically, the word *karīm* in Arabic linguistic heritage conveys the meaning of nobility, honor, and dignity. In the context of this verse, this nobility is directly related to the ethical quality of communication. The verse not only forbids harsh expressions even something as simple as “ah” but also requires communication to embody substantive noble qualities.

These findings indicate that the concept of *qawlan karīman* contains normative dimensions encompassing language quality, emotional attitudes, and moral orientation in communication.

Findings from *Tafsir Al-Azhar*

In *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Hamka explains that the command to speak nobly is not merely a demand for gentle language, but also an instruction to maintain *adab* and purity of heart in speech (Hamka, 2015). Recent studies on Qur'anic communication ethics similarly show that *qawlan karīman* represents an ethical standard of respectful, courteous, and value-based communication that reflects inner moral integrity (Sukmaningtyas et al., 2024; Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Hamka further emphasizes that the prohibition of saying “ah” demonstrates Islam's strong concern for the feelings and dignity of parents, and forbids any expression that conveys annoyance, disrespect, or emotional harshness (Hamka, 2015). This interpretation is in line with recent research on Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23, which finds that *Tafsir Al-Azhar* stresses the avoidance of disrespectful speech and the replacement of harsh expressions with language of love and compassion (Mukhlisin et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Hamka states that noble speech originates from a well-educated heart filled with moral awareness, making words a reflection of one's character. In this sense, good speech is not only a linguistic act but also a form of respect for human dignity and an essential aspect of character education in Islam (Hamka, 2015; Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Based on the content analysis of this interpretation, it can be found that *qawlan karīman* contains indicators of communication values, including verbal politeness, respect for dignity, emotional self-control, and social moral awareness. These values are also consistent with recent studies on Qur'anic communication ethics, which highlight politeness, mutual respect, and ethical responsibility as key dimensions of Islamic communication in contemporary contexts (Sukmaningtyas et al., 2024).

Qawlan Karīman Values

The following table presents the categorization of values based on analysis of the verse and *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Hamka, 2015):

Table 1. Transformation Process of *Qawlan Karīman* Values into Digital Communication Ethics

Qawlan Karīman Values	Evidence in <i>Tafsir Al-Azhar</i>	Process Explanation	Digital Communication Indicators
Verbal Politeness	Hamka emphasizes the prohibition of harsh expressions, including saying “ah,” as a form of disrespect.	The prohibition of hurtful speech is interpreted as a general ethical principle that speech should not offend, demean, or wound others. In digital contexts, this value is transformed into the avoidance of rude, sarcastic, or degrading expressions in online interaction.	Avoid using demeaning words
Respect for Dignity	Speech reflects appreciation and respect toward parents as honored human beings.	Respect shown to parents is extended into a broader communication ethic that every person deserves dignified treatment. In digital communication, this means avoiding condescending, humiliating, or dismissive tones toward others.	Avoid condescending tone
Emotional Self-Control	Hamka explains that noble speech comes from a well-educated heart and controlled feelings.	This interpretation indicates that speech should not be driven by uncontrolled emotion. In digital settings, this value becomes the principle of pausing, reflecting, and avoiding impulsive reactions when angry or offended.	Do not react impulsively when angry
Refinement of Character	Nobility in speech reflects inner attitude, moral cultivation, and personal <i>adab</i> .	Because language reflects character, communication ethics is understood not only as wording but also as self-presentation. In online communication, this value is manifested through consistently gentle,	Use gentle and courteous language



Moral Awareness	Words have consequences for social relationships and can preserve or damage human bonds.	courteous, and respectful language. This shows that speech carries social and moral responsibility. In digital communication, users are expected to consider the possible impact of their words on others and on the wider online community before posting or commenting.	Consider the social consequences of speech
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The table presents the process of thematic content analysis used in this study. Each value of *qawlan karīman* was identified from Hamka's interpretation, interpreted as a broader ethical meaning, and subsequently contextualized into practical indicators of digital communication. This process explains how Qur'anic moral values can be translated into contemporary communication ethics for Generation Z.

The table shows that *qawlan karīman* is not only linguistic, but also reflects a comprehensive communication ethics system, encompassing moral, psychological, and social aspects. Here is the conceptual flow based on the results of the text and tafsir analysis:

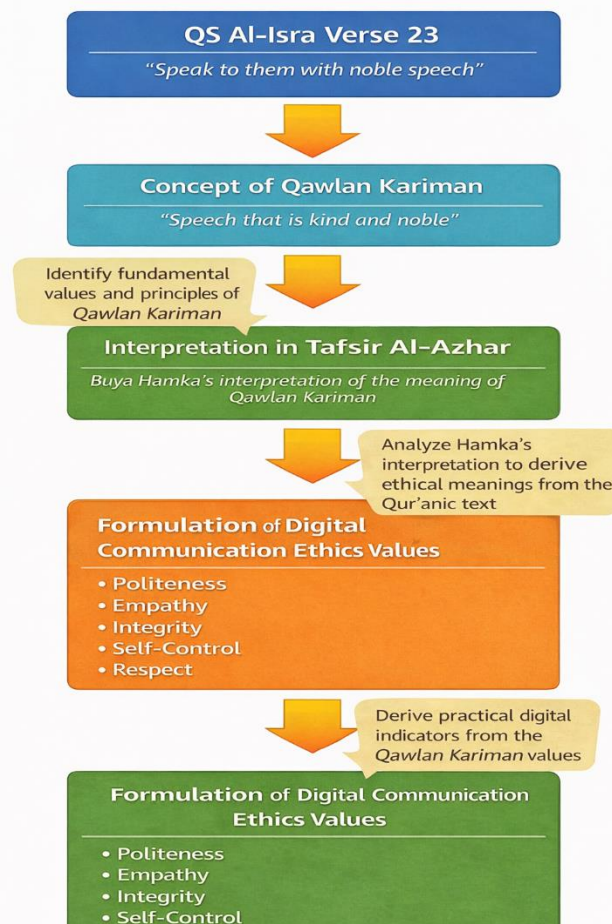


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Qawlan Karīman as a Framework for Generation Z Digital

Figure 1 shows the process of deriving digital communication ethics values from Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23. The process starts from the Qur'anic command of *qawlan karīman*, continues with the conceptual understanding of noble speech, and proceeds to the interpretation of Hamka in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. From this interpretative stage, the study identifies ethical meanings such as politeness, empathy, integrity, self-control, and respect. These values are then formulated as the basis for digital communication ethics in contemporary contexts.

Communication Ethics

This diagram illustrates that the research findings are derived from the divine text, elaborated through classical and modern tafsir, and then formulated into categories of communication ethics values. Such a model is consistent with the thematic (*maudhu'i*) tafsir approach, which focuses on gathering verses related to a specific theme, interpreting them comprehensively, and systematizing their meanings into an integrated value framework relevant to contemporary issues (Subiyakto, 2024; Hidayat & Komarudin, 2024; Ni'am, 2025).



Synthesis of Findings

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that *qawlan karīman* in Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23, as interpreted by Hamka (2015, pp. 72–75), contains a system of communication ethics values encompassing politeness, respect, self-control, and moral awareness. These values are both normative-theological and ethical-social in nature, as they are rooted in divine revelation and have a direct impact on human relationships.

These findings provide a conceptual foundation for the discussion on the relevance of *qawlan karīman* to Generation Z's communication practices in digital spaces.

DISCUSSION

Qawlan Karīman as a Framework for Normative Communication Ethics

The concept of *qawlan karīman* in Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 textually refers to the command to speak with nobility and respect. In Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka (2015) emphasizes that the nobility of speech is not only reflected in the use of gentle words but also in the inner attitude that embodies manners (*adab*) and moral awareness. This interpretation indicates that communication, from a Qur'anic perspective, is not merely the process of transmitting messages but an ethical act with a spiritual dimension.

In contemporary communication theory, modern communication ethics increasingly highlight the moral responsibility dimension in digital public spaces. Recent studies indicate that digital transformation has blurred the boundaries between private and public spheres, making every utterance potentially impactful on a wider scale (Vogels et al., 2022). Therefore, communication can no longer be separated from the social responsibility inherent to each individual.

In digital literacy studies, communication ethics is understood as part of digital citizenship competencies, requiring awareness of the social impact of online speech (UNESCO, 2021). Related to *qawlan karīman*, the value of noble speech holds strong relevance as a normative foundation for fostering responsible communication in digital spaces.

Challenges of Generation Z Communication Ethics in the Digital Era

Generation Z has grown entirely within a social media and internet-based technology ecosystem. Global studies show that the intensity of social media use among adolescents and young adults has increased significantly over the past five years (Odgers & Jensen, 2020). The fast-paced and instant nature of digital interaction often triggers impulsive and reactive responses.

Recent research also shows that high social media exposure correlates with increased online conflicts, cyberbullying, and opinion polarization (Twenge, 2023). In the Indonesian context, empirical studies find that Generation Z tends to express opinions directly and openly but often fails to consider the emotional impact on others (Aulia & Christin, 2024).

This reality indicates an urgent need for the internalization of communication ethics values that go beyond external regulation, emphasizing internal moral awareness. Here, *qawlan karīman* can function as a principle of self-restraint and ethical reflection before engaging in communication.

Integration of Qur'anic Values and the Concept of Digital Citizenship

The concept of digital citizenship in contemporary educational literature emphasizes ethical behavior, empathy, and responsibility in online interactions (UNESCO, 2021). This principle strongly overlaps with the values contained in *qawlan karīman*.

Thematically analyzed, the values of *qawlan karīman* can be integrated into three main dimensions of digital communication:

1. Linguistic Dimension → Avoiding harsh, demeaning, or provocative speech.
2. Psychological Dimension → Controlling emotions and developing digital empathy.
3. Moral-Social Dimension → Considering the long-term impact of one's digital footprint.

Cross-cultural research shows that digital empathy is a key factor in reducing online conflicts and enhancing the quality of social interaction (Vogels et al., 2022). Accordingly, the values of politeness and respect in *qawlan karīman* align with contemporary empirical findings on the importance of empathy in digital communication.

Conceptual Contribution to Contemporary Communication Ethics

Conceptually, this study demonstrates that Qur'anic values are not static but possess adaptive capacity in response to developments in communication technology. The recontextualization of *qawlan karīman* shows that religious texts can serve as a normative foundation for addressing digital communication ethics challenges.

Recent literature on the digital generation emphasizes the importance of a value-based approach in character education (Twenge, 2023). In this context, *qawlan karīman* can be positioned as a revelation-based communication ethics model that enriches secular modern approaches with spiritual and transcendental dimensions.





Thus, the contribution of this research lies in the integration of classical-modern tafsir (Hamka, 2015) and contemporary digital communication theory (Odgers & Jensen, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). This integration produces a communication ethics model that is not only normative-theological but also empirically relevant in addressing the challenges faced by Generation Z in the social media era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the concept of *qawlan karīman* in Surah Al-Isrā' verse 23 contains a system of communication ethics values that are normative, moral, and social. Textually, the phrase emphasizes the importance of speaking with nobility, gentleness, and respect. The prohibition of saying "ah" indicates that Islam places communication sensitivity at a very fundamental level, even in the simplest verbal expressions.

Based on analysis of Tafsir Al-Azhar, Hamka affirms that the nobility of speech is not only linguistic but also rooted in purity of heart and moral education. Therefore, *qawlan karīman* reflects the integration of linguistic, psychological, and moral dimensions in communication.

Through thematic analysis, this study identifies five main values contained in the concept: verbal politeness, respect for dignity, emotional self-control, refinement of character, and social moral awareness. These values form a comprehensive communication ethics framework that can be actualized in the context of digital communication.

In the landscape of Generation Z communication, characterized by intense social media use, rapid information flows, and impulsive expression tendencies, the principle of *qawlan karīman* has significant relevance as a foundation for digital communication ethics. The concept serves not only as an individual moral guideline but also as a normative framework for building a dignified public communication culture.

Conceptually, this study demonstrates that Qur'anic values have adaptive capacity in response to technological and social transformation. The integration of classical-modern tafsir and contemporary communication theory produces a revelation-based communication ethics model that is relevant for addressing the challenges of Generation Z in the digital era.

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