

PROPHETIC COMMUNICATION ETHICS AS A FOUNDATION FOR MORALITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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Abstract

Prophetic communication is a process of information exchange that aims not merely for message effectiveness but also constitutes a form of moral responsibility for the communicator—one that must be accounted for before God. Ethics serves as the moral foundation for a communicator driven by a spirit of humanization aimed at transcendence. Consequently, the success of prophetic communication is measured not only by the effectiveness and efficiency of message delivery—as is the case with conventional communication—but also by its alignment with ethical and moral values and its grounding in truth. Through a qualitative literature review, Kuntowijoyo identified three pillars of prophetic communication: humanization, liberation, and transcendence. Each pillar is then analyzed in the context of realities within the public sphere. Unlike daily life, which is structured by existing societal norms, the digital-era public sphere requires a framework to manage its rapid communication patterns. The ethics of prophetic communication encompass six elements: the concept of public-sphere morality, communicator honesty and credibility, social responsibility in message delivery, the avoidance of hoaxes and hate speech, tabayyun (verification of information), and the cultivation of an ethical communication culture. The integration of the public sphere concept and the culture of ethical communication contributes significantly to the development of a prophetic communication paradigm one that is not only effective in message delivery but also oriented toward fostering a civilized, inclusive, and just society.

Keyword: Prophetic Communication, Ethics, Public Sphere

1. Introduction

Communication is an activity inseparable from human life. From an Islamic perspective, communication is not merely a process of exchanging information but also a form of moral responsibility for which one is accountable before Allah (SWT). Consequently, the success of communication is measured not only by the effectiveness of message delivery but also by its alignment with values of ethics, morality, and truth.

The concept of prophetic communication stems from the conviction that the prophets—particularly Prophet Muhammad serve as ideal role models for establishing communication grounded in divine revelation, noble character, and respect for human dignity. The Qur'an portrays the Messenger of Allah as a figure of sublime character (*khuluqin 'azhim*), as stated by Allah (SWT): "And indeed, you are of a great moral character" (Q.S. al-Qalam 68: 4). This verse demonstrates that the success of the Messenger's da'wah (mission) was determined not only by the content of the message he conveyed but also by the quality of character that underpinned all his communicative behavior (Sucipto, 2021).

In modern communication studies, communication ethics is understood as a set of values governing how messages are conveyed ensuring they are correct, honest, fair, and responsible, while respecting the rights of others (Mulayana, 2017). These principles align strongly with the concept of prophetic communication. Therefore, examining the ethics of communication—as well as the honesty and credibility of the communicator is essential to understanding how the Messenger's communication can serve as a model for communication practices across various spheres of life.

In Islamic studies, the element of transcendence is fundamental for a human being or a servant of God to remain grounded in divine values. One approach that has emerged within the Islamic scholarly tradition is "prophetic communication." This paradigm is rooted in prophetic values derived from Islamic teachings and positions communication as an instrument for fostering humanity,

liberating people from various forms of injustice, and connecting social life with transcendental values (Hasibuan, 2019).

This paradigm offers a new perspective on understanding communication as an activity that aims not only to achieve successful communication but also to realize equitable social well-being and ethical social change

2. Literature Review

The researchers then employed a communication approach to identify and understand the relevance of the concepts developed by Kuntowijoyo namely humanization, liberation, and transcendence to contemporary communication practices, including dakwah (Islamic outreach), public communication, and ethics communication (Kuntowijoyo, 2008).

Research by Agung Drajat “The Paradigm of Prophetic Social Science and Communication: Humanization, Liberation, and Transcendence from Kuntowijoyo’s Perspective”, proposes the fundamental paradigm of prophetic communication as a critique of conventional, positivist-leaning communication in the modern era. By incorporating the orientations of humanism, liberation, and transcendence as articulated by Kuntowijoyo in his concept of Prophetic Social Science (ISP), prophetic communication acquires a broader scope, capable of fostering positive, progressive, and consistent social transformation. It embodies various inherent characteristics, ranging from a commitment to truth and a foundation in humanity to the emulation of the prophetic model (Sucipto, 2026b).

The Prophetic Social Science paradigm developed by Kuntowijoyo serves as an epistemological alternative to the dominance of the often-secular, positivist social sciences (Kuntowijoyo, 2004). This paradigm is grounded in three core values humanization, liberation, and transcendence derived from Surah Ali Imran, verse 110, of the Quran. From a communication perspective, humanization functions to humanize individuals through dialogue and respect for human dignity. Liberation positions communication as a vehicle for emancipation from various forms of oppression and social injustice. Meanwhile, transcendence directs communication toward divine values as the ultimate orientation of human life.

The integration of these three values gives rise to a prophetic communication paradigm that is not only socially effective but also spiritually meaningful. This paradigm is relevant for addressing contemporary communication challenges characterized by ethical crises, dehumanization, and moral disorientation. The prophetic communication paradigm fosters a sense of dignity while instilling (Sucipto, 2026a).

3. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a literature review (library research) method. Research data were obtained from national and international journal articles discussing prophetic social studies from the perspective of communication science. The data were analyzed through stages of identification, classification, thematic analysis, and conceptual synthesis to identify emerging research patterns within the field of digital literacy studies (Sucipto, 2021).

In the evolving landscape of modern communication science, research is not always conducted through observation, interviews, surveys, or experiments. Various communication-related issues can be examined by exploring and analyzing previously published knowledge (Sugiyono, 2011). This approach serves as the foundation for literature review (or library research) studies within the discipline of communication science.

In the context of communication science, a literature review is not merely an activity of gathering theories; rather, it can function as an independent research method. It is a standalone research approach characterized by systematic scientific procedures—ranging from source searching and data selection to analysis and the synthesis of findings.

A literature review enables researchers to map the development of prophetic social theory—as articulated by Kuntowijoyo and others—and its subsequent transformation within communication science studies (Kuntowijoyo, 1998). Furthermore, researchers can identify trends in the evolution of the prophetic paradigm and pinpoint research gaps in conventional communication, ultimately developing a novel conceptual model: prophetic communication

4. Results and Discussion

1) The Concept of Communication Ethics

Communication ethics refers to the set of moral values governing an individual's behavior when conveying or receiving messages. In Islam, communication is not viewed as a value-neutral activity but

rather as an act of worship that must be carried out in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. Consequently, every spoken word, written text, or other form of communication carries an ethical dimension for which one will be held accountable.

The Qur'an provides several communication principles that form the basis of a Muslim's communication ethics. These include "*qaulan sadidan*" (truthful speech), as found in Surah Al-Ahzab 33: 70, "*qaulan balighan*" (impactful speech) in Surah An-Nisa' 4: 63, "*qaulan ma'rufan*" (kind speech) in Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 263, "*qaulan kariman*" (noble speech) in Surah Al-Isra' 17: 23, "*qaulan layyin*" (gentle speech) in Surah Taha 20: 44, and "*qaulan maysuran*" (appropriate and pleasant speech) in Surah Al-Isra' 17:28. These principles demonstrate that Islam pays attention not only to the content of a message but also to the manner of its delivery.

In practice, the Prophet Muhammad always prioritized courtesy in communication. He spoke using language that was clear and easy to understand, avoiding excessiveness and refraining from hurting others' feelings. A Hadith mentions that the Messenger of Allah spoke calmly, ensuring his words were easily understood by his listeners. This manner of speaking reflects a form of communication that respects the recipient's capacity to comprehend the message (Abdullah, 2020).

The communication ethics of the Messenger of Allah were also evident in his attitude when dealing with differences of opinion. He did not use harsh language, belittle the person he was speaking to, or humiliate anyone in the presence of others. Even when dealing with harsh individuals, the Messenger of Allah consistently chose an approach characterized by courtesy and patience. This aligns with Allah's command to Moses and Aaron to speak to Pharaoh using "*qaulan layyin*"—gentle and mild speech—despite Pharaoh's reputation as a tyrannical ruler (Q.S. Taha 20:44).

From the perspective of communication studies, a courteous attitude and respect for one's interlocutor are integral to ethical communication. Communication grounded in ethics fosters mutual trust, strengthens social bonds, and mitigates the potential for conflict. Conversely, communication involving lies, slander, insults, or hate speech damages social relationships and undermines the integrity of both individuals and society. Ethical communication also demands accountability regarding the information conveyed.

2) Honesty and Communicator Credibility

Honesty is a fundamental pillar of prophetic communication. In Islam, honesty (*ṣidiq*) is understood not merely as the alignment of speech with facts, but also as the harmony between words, intentions, and actions. The Messenger of Allah was known for his honesty even before his appointment as a prophet. The titles As-Shadiq (the Truthful) and *al-Amin* (the Trustworthy) were bestowed upon him by the people of Mecca in recognition of his integrity (Ummah, 2026).

Communicator credibility is a crucial concept in the field of communication studies. A communicator can more easily influence an audience if perceived as possessing competence, integrity, and trustworthy character. In Aristotelian rhetorical theory, this aspect is known as *ethos* the moral and intellectual qualities inherent in the communicator that allow their message to gain the audience's trust.

The success of the Prophet's da'wah (mission of conveying the message of Islam) was significantly influenced by this credibility. Although many Quraysh leaders rejected Islamic teachings, they acknowledged the Prophet's personal honesty. When he gathered the Quraysh at Mount Safa and asked if they would believe him were he to report an army preparing to attack from behind the hill, they replied that they had never known him to lie. This admission demonstrates that the Prophet's moral reputation was established long before he delivered his prophetic message.

Honesty in communication is also manifested through consistency between words and actions. The Prophet Muhammad never commanded anything without first practicing it himself. He served as a role model in acts of worship, honest trade, social concern, and respect for the rights of others. This consistency reinforced his credibility as a communicator, as the community witnessed firsthand the practical application of the values he taught.

In addition to honesty, a communicator's credibility is also built upon competence. The Prophet possessed the ability to explain Islamic teachings in a manner suited to the audience's level of understanding. He employed simple language when addressing the general public, provided deeper explanations to companions possessing scholarly aptitude, and engaged in dialogue grounded in strong arguments when interacting with figures from other faiths. His ability to tailor his message to the nature of his audience demonstrates a high level of communication proficiency.

In the context of contemporary communication, a communicator's credibility serves as a primary asset in building public trust. The digital media era demonstrates that information conveyed by non-credible sources is more easily questioned or even rejected. Consequently, the principles of prophetic communication emphasizing honesty, trustworthiness, competence, and responsibility remain relevant as an ethical foundation across various fields, including journalism, education, governance, religious

outreach, and organizational communication.

Thus, prophetic communication teaches that successful communication depends not only on rhetorical skill but also on the communicator's moral quality. Honesty and credibility are key assets that imbue a message with influence and ensure its broad acceptance by the public.

Moreover, the honesty and credibility of the Messenger (Muhammad) formed the cornerstone of his successful communication. His reputation as a person who was honest, trustworthy, and consistent in word and deed combined with his competence in conveying messages ensured that the Islamic message was received with complete trust. These values remain relevant in addressing modern communication challenges, particularly in the digital era, which demands that information be conveyed with responsibility, accuracy, and integrity.

3) Social Responsibility in Message Delivery

In the field of communication studies, social responsibility is the principle that any individual or institution conveying information is obliged to consider the social impact of the message being delivered. Information should not be judged solely by its ability to capture public attention, but also by its utility, veracity, and consequences for the life of the community.

From the perspective of prophetic communication, the delivery of a message is a trust for which one must answer to Allah (SWT) and to society. Propeth Muhammad taught that every word carries moral consequences. Therefore, a Muslim is required to guard their speech, ensuring they convey only information that is truthful and beneficial. This principle is affirmed in the words of Allah (SWT):

"O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate truth (qaulan sadīdan)." (Q.S. al-Ahzab 33: 70).

The concept of *qaulan sadīdan* implies that communication must be grounded in honesty, accuracy of information, and moral integrity. According to M. Quraish Shihab, *qaulan sadīdan* signifies not merely speaking the truth, but also conveying information accurately and responsibly, while providing benefit to others (Nurrahim, 2025).

In the practice of da'wah (preaching), Muhammad always ensured that the information conveyed aligned with divine revelation and factual reality. He never added to, omitted from, or manipulated the message for personal gain. This attitude demonstrates that a communicator's credibility is built upon a commitment to the truth.

Social responsibility in communication is also evident in the Prophet's ability to consider the impact of a message before conveying it. On numerous occasions, he chose gentle words, avoided disparaging other groups, and prioritized conflict resolution through dialogue. This approach demonstrates that communication aims not merely to convey information but also to preserve societal unity and harmony.

In modern communication theory, this approach aligns with the Social Responsibility Theory developed by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm (Sucipto, 2026c). This theory asserts that the freedom to express opinions must be accompanied by a responsibility to protect the public interest, respect the rights of others, and avoid disseminating information that could cause social harm.

In the digital era, social responsibility has become increasingly crucial, as a single social media post can reach millions of people in a very short time. Therefore, individuals must possess digital literacy, critical thinking skills, and ethical awareness before sharing information with the public. Prophetic communication provides a moral foundation, establishing that any information disseminated must adhere to the principles of truthfulness, utility, and the common good.

4) Avoiding Hoaxes, Slander, and Hate Speech

Advancements in information and communication technology have brought about significant changes in patterns of social interaction. The advent of mass media, social media, and digital platforms enables individuals to act as both producers and disseminators of information (Ilham et al., 2025). On one hand, this development expands the scope of public participation and accelerates the flow of communication. On the other hand, this ease of access gives rise to various ethical issues, such as the spread of unverified information, hoaxes, slander, hate speech, information manipulation, and social polarization.

From a communication studies perspective, every message conveyed carries social consequences. Consequently, communication is viewed not merely as a process of information exchange but also as an activity entailing moral responsibility toward both individuals and society. Social Responsibility Theory asserts that the freedom to communicate must be balanced with the obligation to convey information that is true, accurate, and balanced, and that does not harm the public interest (Abdul Rasyid Ridho, 2021).

One of the greatest challenges in modern communication is the rampant spread of hoaxes,

slander, and hate speech. A hoax is false information deliberately created to mislead the public, whereas slander involves disseminating false accusations or information that damages a person's reputation. Hate speech, meanwhile, is a form of communication intended to insult, demean, or incite hatred against individuals or groups based on specific identities.

From an Islamic perspective, these three forms of communication conflict with prophetic values because they undermine trust, brotherhood, and social stability (Abdullah, 2024). The Qur'an commands Muslims to verify any information before believing or disseminating it:

"O you who have believed! If there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate it tabayyun, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful".

Prophet Muhammad also cautioned against the hasty dissemination of every piece of information one hears. A hadith states: *"It is sufficient for a person to be considered a liar if he narrates everything he hears."* This hadith teaches that every individual bears the responsibility to verify the validity of information before spreading it. Passing on unverified information can make one complicit in the spread of falsehoods, even without the intent to deceive.

Beyond hoaxes, Islam prohibits slander (*fitnah*) and backbiting (*ghibah*). The Qur'an depicts backbiting as a highly reprehensible act because it damages human honor and severs ties of brotherhood (Q.S. al-Hujurat 49: 12). Prophet Muhammad also reminded us that a true Muslim is one from whose tongue and hands others are safe. Consequently, communication that hurts, humiliates, or defames others runs counter to the ethics of prophetic communication.

The phenomenon of hate speech on social media is also a subject of concern in contemporary communication studies. Hate speech can trigger social conflict, political polarization, discrimination, and even violence. Therefore, prophetic communication advocates for the use of language that is courteous (*qaulan ma'ufan*), noble (*qaulan kariman*), and gentle (*qaulan layyinan*). These principles encourage resolving differences through civilized dialogue rather than through insults or provocation.

In the context of communication studies, preventing hoaxes and hate speech cannot rely solely on legal regulations; it also requires education in communication ethics, media literacy, and critical thinking skills, as well as the cultivation of the communicator's character. The Prophet's communication model exemplifies that effective communication always prioritizes truth, compassion, respect for human dignity, and social responsibility.

5) *Tabayyun* as Information Verification

Linguistically, "*tabayyun*" derives from the word "*tabayyana*", meaning to seek clarity, examine, scrutinize, or ascertain the veracity of information before adopting a stance (Al-faqiha & Azzahra, 2026). From a communication perspective, *tabayyun* constitutes a process of information verification aimed at ensuring that a received message meets standards of truth, accuracy, and reliability before being accepted as a basis for decision-making or disseminated to others.

The primary foundation for the concept of *tabayyun* lies in the word of Allah (SWT):

"O you who have believed! If there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate its truth (fatabayyanu), lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful." (Q.S. al-Hujurat 49: 6).

According to M. Quraish Shihab, this verse embodies a universal principle: all information must undergo a process of scrutiny regarding its source, content, context, and potential impact before serving as a basis for action. Thus, *tabayyun* applies not only to religious news but encompasses all forms of social, political, economic, and media communication (Quraish Shihab, 2012).

From the perspective of communication science, this principle aligns with the concepts of gatekeeping, fact-checking, and verification journalism—processes of filtering information to ensure that messages reaching the public meet accuracy standards and are accountable. Such processes are integral to communication ethics, aiming to uphold the quality of the public sphere and prevent the spread of misleading information.

Islam has established a normative foundation regarding the importance of information verification through the concept of *tabayyun*. This principle not only advocates caution in accepting news but also asserts that the dissemination of information is a moral trust for which one must answer before Allah (SWT) and society. Furthermore, prophetic communication emphasizes the importance of cultivating an ethical communication culture—one that upholds honesty, justice, respect for human dignity, and social responsibility.

Prophetic communication teaches not only how to convey information but also how to receive it critically. The Prophet set an example for Muslims not to be hasty in believing every piece of news. A Hadith states: *"It is sufficient for a person to be considered a liar if he narrates everything he hears."*

This Hadith conveys the message that disseminating unverified information constitutes irresponsible communication. Even if one does not fabricate a lie, passing on information of

unconfirmed veracity can make one complicit in the spread of misinformation.

In mass communication studies, the verification process involves several stages: identifying the information source, checking data validity, confirming with relevant parties, analyzing the context, and evaluating the potential impact of disseminating the information. These principles align with the concept of *tabayyun* (verification/clarification) taught in the Qur'an.

In the digital media era, *tabayyun* has become increasingly crucial because the nature of social media allows information to go viral before it is verified. Digital media algorithms often prioritize popularity over accuracy, causing sensational information to spread faster than factual information. Under these circumstances, every media user bears a moral responsibility to verify information before sharing it.

Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to use technology but also the capacity to understand, evaluate, and produce information responsibly. The concept of *tabayyun* can serve as the ethical foundation for digital literacy from an Islamic perspective.

Through *tabayyun*, the public is encouraged to adopt a critical attitude toward information sources, distinguish between fact and opinion, recognize information manipulation, and avoid spreading hoaxes, slander, and propaganda. Therefore, **tabayyun** is not merely a religious teaching but also a vital communication competency in an information society. Thus, the concept of *tabayyun* and the culture of ethical communication are highly relevant to the development of contemporary communication studies, particularly in addressing the challenges of digital communication in the 21st century.

6) Building a Culture of Ethical Communication

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered how humans produce, distribute, and consume information. The advent of the internet, social media, and instant messaging applications has accelerated the flow of communication while simultaneously blurring the boundaries between information producers and consumers. Individuals can now act as communicators, conveying information to a vast audience in a matter of seconds. While this phenomenon significantly benefits the democratization of information, it simultaneously gives rise to serious issues such as the spread of hoaxes, disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech, as well as the manipulation of public opinion and social polarization.

From the perspective of communication studies, information is a strategic resource that shapes public perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. Consequently, the quality of information is a crucial factor in maintaining the quality of social life. Inaccurate information not only misleads individuals but can also trigger social conflict, erode public trust, and disrupt societal stability. Therefore, communication ethics requires every communicator to cultivate a culture of responsibility by verifying information before conveying or disseminating it.

A culture of ethical communication is a communication pattern grounded in the moral values that govern human relationships. In the field of communication studies, communication ethics is understood as a set of norms guiding communicators to convey information honestly, fairly, and responsibly, while respecting human dignity and avoiding actions that harm others.

Prophetic communication provides a robust foundation for building such a culture of communication. The Prophet taught not only the substance of truthful communication but also the manner of communicating characterized by courtesy, compassion, and respect for every individual's right to be heard and treated fairly.

The culture of ethical communication in Islam finds its most perfect embodiment in the Prophet Muhammad. He was known as a communicator who was truthful, trustworthy, and courteous, and whose words were always consistent with his actions. Even before his appointment as a prophet, the people of Mecca had bestowed upon him the title **al-Amin** (the Trustworthy) in recognition of his impeccable integrity. In his interactions, the Prophet Muhammad consistently demonstrated respect for those with whom he spoke. He would not interrupt others, listened attentively, used language that was easy to understand, and avoided hurtful words. When dealing with those who held differing opinions, he prioritized dialogue, sound argumentation, and consultation.

The Prophet's communication ethics were also evident in his ability to uphold the dignity of others. He would not publicly shame someone who had made a mistake; instead, he offered counsel in a wise and tactful manner. Such an approach demonstrates that the goal of communication is not to win an argument, but to improve behavior and foster harmonious relationships.

Digital society faces increasingly complex communication challenges, ranging from information overload, polarization, and social media algorithms to the phenomenon of echo chambers. In such a context, cultivating a culture of ethical communication becomes vitally important.

A culture of ethical communication can be fostered through several steps. First, making it a

habit to verify information before sharing it with others. Second, using polite language and respecting differences of opinion. Third, avoiding the dissemination of hate speech, slander, and provocative information. Fourth, treating communication as a means to build mutual understanding rather than to exacerbate conflict. Fifth, developing media literacy so that the public can recognize credible information and distinguish it from manipulative content.

From the perspective of prophetic communication, ethical communication not only fosters social order but also constitutes an act of worship, as every utterance is viewed as a trust for which one will be held accountable. Thus, a culture of ethical communication serves as a vital foundation for realizing a society that is peaceful, just, and mutually respectful. Moreover, establishing a culture of ethical communication is a key prerequisite for creating a harmonious social life.

5. Conclusion

Prophetic communication is a process of information exchange that aims not merely for message effectiveness but also constitutes a form of moral responsibility for the communicator—one that must be accounted for before God. Ethics serves as the moral foundation for a communicator driven by a spirit of humanization aimed at transcendence. Consequently, the success of prophetic communication is measured not only by the effectiveness and efficiency of message delivery—as is the case with conventional communication—but also by its alignment with ethical and moral values and its grounding in truth.

The ethics of prophetic communication encompass six elements: the concept of public-sphere morality, communicator honesty and credibility, social responsibility in message delivery, the avoidance of hoaxes and hate speech, tabayyun (verification of information), and the cultivation of an ethical communication culture. The integration of the public sphere concept and the culture of ethical communication contributes significantly to the development of a prophetic communication paradigm one that is not only effective in message delivery but also oriented toward fostering a civilized, inclusive, and just society

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