

The Relevance of *Qaulan Kariman* to the Ethics of Elementary School Children's Digital Communication with Their Parents

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Abstract: Digital communication has expanded the ways elementary-school-age children interact with their parents, but the ethical meaning of particular messaging practices cannot be determined solely from their form. This article examines the meaning of *qaulan kariman*, or noble and honoring speech, in Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 and considers its relevance to children's digital communication with their parents. The study employed qualitative library research through interpretive document analysis and a focused critical literature review. The primary corpus comprised Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 and selected interpretations by M. Quraish Shihab and Wahbah al-Zuhayli. The secondary corpus included scholarly literature on Qur'anic communication ethics, parent-child communication, parental mediation, and digitally mediated interaction. The analysis distinguished direct textual meaning, exegetical elaboration, and contextual digital application and found that *qaulan kariman* requires communication that preserves parental dignity through respect, restraint, and consideration. The principle does not prescribe specific forms of address, complete sentences, immediate replies, or the avoidance of emojis. Short messages, delayed responses, emojis, and voice messages are not inherently respectful or disrespectful; their ethical meaning depends on wording, purpose, urgency, relational expectations, and context. The article consequently formulates a context-sensitive framework comprising respect for parental dignity, avoidance of contemptuous expression, sufficient clarity, appropriate emotional tone, reasonable responsiveness, and communicative repair. The framework applies the ethical purpose of Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 without presenting contemporary messaging conventions as explicit Qur'anic commands.

Keywords: *Qaulan kariman; Digital communication ethics; Elementary school children; Parent-child communication; Qur'anic communication*

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A. Introduction

Digital media have become part of everyday family interaction. Messaging applications, voice messages, and video calls allow parents and children to communicate across different locations and schedules, but they also alter the conditions under which meaning is conveyed. Written messages do not reproduce every facial, vocal, and situational cue available in face-to-face conversation. Their ethical interpretation therefore depends not only on the length or form of a message but also on its wording, purpose, relational context, and the expectations shared within a family.¹ Digital communication should consequently be examined as an extension of family interaction rather than treated as inherently inferior to direct conversation.

Research on parental mediation provides an important background for understanding children's digital practices. Parental mediation includes discussion, co-use, supervision, monitoring, restrictions, modeling, and the communication of family norms.² An Indonesian study of children aged 9–12 found that the participants perceived moderate levels of parental involvement through active co-use and interaction restrictions but lower levels of monitoring and technical restriction.³ More recent Indonesian research similarly indicates that parents combine restrictive and enabling strategies when guiding young people's use of social media.⁴ These studies demonstrate that children's digital behavior develops within continuing interaction with parents. They do not, however, establish that particular message forms—such as brief replies, delayed responses, or emojis—are intrinsically respectful or disrespectful.

Qur'anic ethics address communication with parents especially clearly in Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23. The verse prohibits even a minimal verbal expression of irritation toward parents and commands the child to address them with *qaulan kariman*, or noble and honoring speech. In its immediate context, the instruction concerns respect for parents, especially when one or both have reached old age and require patience and care. Quraish Shihab interprets the verse as requiring language and conduct that preserve parental dignity rather than merely avoiding openly abusive speech.⁵ The expression therefore

¹Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

²Sonia Livingstone and Ellen J. Helsper, "Parental Mediation of Children's Internet Use," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 52, no. 4 (2008): 581–599, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150802437396>; Lynn Schofield Clark, "Parental Mediation Theory for the Digital Age," *Communication Theory* 21, no. 4 (2011): 323–343, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01391.x>.

³Aliya Ulfa, Hendriati Agustiani, Laila Qodariah, and Ratna Jatnika, "Children's Perceptions of Parental Mediation on Internet Use," *Kajian Psikologi dan Kesehatan Mental* 1, no. 2 (2023): 97–108, <https://doi.org/10.35912/kpkm.v1i2.2759>.

⁴Eka Riyanti Purboningsih, Karlijn Massar, Zahrotur Rusyda Hinduan, Hendriati Agustiani, Robert A. C. Ruiter, and Philippe Verduyn, "Parental Mediation Strategies for Social Media Use: A Thematic Analysis of Perspectives among Indonesian Parents and Adolescents," *Behaviour & Information Technology* 44, no. 12 (2025): 2838–2859, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2024.2413454>.

⁵M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 7, 8th ed. (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007), commentary on Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23.

identifies an ethical orientation grounded in honor, restraint, and sensitivity to the position of the addressee.

Studies of Qur'anic verbal communication generally place *qaulan kariman* alongside other expressions such as *qaulan sadidan* (truthful speech), *qaulan ma'rufan* (appropriate speech), and *qaulan layyinan* (gentle speech). Each expression occurs in a particular textual and relational context and should not be reduced to an interchangeable list of communication techniques.⁶ Scholarship on Islamic communication has accordingly interpreted *qaulan kariman* as speech that avoids humiliation and conveys respect, particularly in communication with parents and older persons.⁷ This interpretive foundation permits contemporary application, but the application must remain distinguishable from the lexical and contextual meaning of the verse itself.

Previous studies have already related Qur'anic communication principles to modern and digital settings. Janah and Yusuf discuss Qur'anic ethics for social-media communication, although their primary concerns are peaceful interaction, appropriate speech, and information verification.⁸ Sukmaningtyas and colleagues examine a broader group of Qur'anic communication principles and their relevance to communication in modern online and offline environments.⁹ Research has also addressed Islamic ethics in parent-child communication more generally, including gentleness, honesty, patience, exemplary conduct, and mutual respect.¹⁰ These studies mean that the present article cannot claim to be the first to connect Qur'anic ethics with either digital communication or family relationships.

The remaining gap is more specific. Existing Qur'anic communication studies usually discuss general interpersonal communication, preaching, social media, or broad family ethics, whereas parental-mediation studies primarily examine children's internet use, online risk, and parental regulation. Limited attention has been given to how *qaulan kariman* may function as a focused normative framework for evaluating digital communication initiated by elementary-school-age children toward their parents. A further conceptual problem concerns how the principle can be contextualized without treating every short reply, emoji, or delayed response as evidence of disrespect. The

⁶Subhan Afifi and Irwan Nuryana Kurniawan, "Ragam Komunikasi Verbal dalam Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Komunikasi* 15, no. 2 (2021): 153–170, <https://doi.org/10.20885/komunikasi.vol15.iss2.art6>.

⁷Najhan Dzulhusna, Nunung Nurhasanah, and Yuda Nur Suherman, "Qaulan Sadida, Qaulan Ma'rufa, Qaulan Baligha, Qaulan Maysura, Qaulan Layyina dan Qaulan Karima Itu sebagai Landasan Etika Komunikasi dalam Dakwah," *Journal of Islamic Social Science and Communication (JISSC) DIKSI* 1, no. 2 (2022): 76–84, <https://doi.org/10.54801/jisscdiksi.v1i02.114>.

⁸Futihatul Janah and Apriyadi Yusuf, "Etika Komunikasi di Media Sosial Melalui Prinsip SMART (Salam, Ma'ruf, dan Tabayyun) Perspektif Al-Quran," *JAWI* 3, no. 2 (2020): 101–118, <https://doi.org/10.24042/jw.v3i2.8068>.

⁹Anisa Nur Izzati Sukmaningtyas et al., "Etika Komunikasi Al-Qur'an dan Relevansinya dengan Komunikasi di Zaman Modern," *Jurnal Semiotika-Q: Kajian Ilmu Al-Quran dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (2024): 556–576, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jsq.v4i2.23981>.

¹⁰Puji Asriani and Wahyudi Wahyudi, "The Ethics of Parent-Child Communication in Islam: Insights Derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah," *Bulletin of Indonesian Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (2025): 1021–1049, <https://doi.org/10.51214/biis.v4i2.1731>.

ethical status of a digital message cannot be inferred from its format alone; its wording, intention, circumstances, and relational effects must also be considered.

Against this background, this article examines three questions: how is *qaulan kariman* interpreted in the textual context of Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23; what characteristics of mediated family communication identified in the literature are relevant to child–parent interaction; and how can the principle of *qaulan kariman* inform a context-sensitive framework for evaluating children's digital communication with their parents? The study uses focused exegetical analysis and interpretive literature analysis to bring selected exegetical works into dialogue with scholarship on family communication and parental mediation.

The article offers a normative-conceptual contribution rather than an empirical description of elementary school children's actual messaging practices. It does not determine how frequently children use particular forms of communication, diagnose individual behavior, or test whether a Qur'an-based communication program changes children's conduct. Its contribution lies in clarifying the interpretive basis, scope, and limitations of applying *qaulan kariman* to contemporary digital family communication.

B. Method

This study employed qualitative library research using interpretive document analysis. Document analysis was appropriate because the study examined Qur'anic text, exegetical works, and scholarly publications rather than data obtained from participants, observations, or digital-message archives.¹¹ The study was designed as a focused critical literature review, not a systematic review intended to identify every publication on the topic. Its purpose was to construct a normatively grounded interpretation and examine its relevance to a contemporary communication context.¹²

The primary textual corpus consisted of Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 and its interpretation in M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* and Wahbah al-Zuhayli's *Tafsir al-Munir*. These works were purposively selected because they directly discuss the command to speak to parents using *qaulan kariman*—noble and honoring speech—and explain its relationship to respect, gentleness, and filial conduct.¹³ Al-Zuhayli's discussion was consulted in the Indonesian translation of the commentary on Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23–24.¹⁴

The secondary corpus comprised peer-reviewed literature on Qur'anic communication ethics, parent–child communication, parental mediation of children's media use, and the interpretation of messages in digitally mediated environments. Studies

¹¹Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

¹²Hannah Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019): 333–339, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.

¹³Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, commentary on Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23.

¹⁴Wahbah al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir al-Munir: Aqidah, Syariah, dan Manhaj*, trans. Abdul Hayyie al-Kattani et al., vol. 8 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2016), 31–32.

of other Qur'anic speech expressions were used only when they helped distinguish *qaulan kariman* from broader concepts of ethical communication.¹⁵

Sources were selected when they met at least one of the following criteria: they directly interpreted Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23; examined Qur'anic principles of verbal communication; discussed parent-child interaction in digital environments; or addressed how textual and visual cues are interpreted in digital messages. Publications were excluded when their connection to the research questions was merely incidental. Popular websites and unsupported opinion pieces were not treated as principal evidence.

The analysis proceeded in four stages. First, Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 was examined within its immediate textual context, particularly the prohibition against expressions of irritation and the command to address parents honorably. Second, the selected exegetical works were compared to identify the normative components of *qaulan kariman*. Third, studies of parental mediation and digitally mediated communication were reviewed to identify communication conditions relevant to elementary-school-age children. Fourth, the textual principles and communication literature were synthesized through three analytical categories: direct textual meaning, exegetical elaboration, and contextual digital application.

This distinction prevented contemporary communication practices from being presented as though they were explicitly prescribed in the verse. Respectful forms of address, message clarity, response timing, and emoji use were therefore evaluated as possible contextual applications rather than fixed textual requirements. The analysis also considered evidence that challenges categorical assumptions about digital communication, particularly findings that emojis may clarify or complicate meaning depending on context.

To maintain analytical credibility, theological propositions were attributed to the Qur'anic and exegetical corpus, while claims concerning children and digital media were attributed to empirical communication literature. No claims were made about the frequency or prevalence of particular messaging practices among elementary school children. Because the study used publicly available documents and did not involve participants, personal data, private messages, interviews, or interventions, institutional ethical approval and informed consent were not applicable.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Normative Meaning of *Qaulan Kariman* in Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23

Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 places the obligation to treat parents well immediately after the command to worship God alone. When one or both parents reach old age, children are prohibited from expressing even a minor sign of irritation, represented by the expression “uff,” and from rebuking them. The verse then gives the positive command to address them with *qaulan kariman*, or noble and honoring speech.¹⁶

¹⁵Afifi and Kurniawan, “Ragam Komunikasi Verbal,” 161-162.

¹⁶Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya: Edisi Penyempurnaan 2019* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2019), Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23.

The structure of the verse establishes two related ethical dimensions. The first is prohibitive: communication must not express contempt, rejection, or verbal aggression. The second is constructive: children are required to communicate in a manner that preserves their parents' dignity. The ethical meaning of *qaulan kariman* therefore cannot be reduced to grammatical correctness or formal politeness. It concerns the relational effect of speech and the attitude toward parents conveyed through it.

Shihab interprets *kariman* as a form of nobility appropriate to the person being addressed. In the context of Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23, the expression requires children to use language that honors their parents and does not diminish their position.¹⁷ Al-Zuhayli similarly connects the verse with gentle treatment, respectful speech, and the avoidance of even minor verbal conduct that could hurt one's parents.¹⁸ Both interpretations place the emphasis on dignity and filial conduct rather than on a prescribed list of words.

This reading is consistent with broader studies of Qur'anic verbal communication. Qur'anic expressions involving *qawl* do not constitute interchangeable labels for "good communication"; their ethical emphases vary according to the audience, purpose, and textual context.¹⁹ *Qaulan kariman* is distinctive because it appears in a passage specifically addressing children's conduct toward parents. The first research question can therefore be answered as follows: *qaulan kariman* is a relational principle requiring speech that protects parental dignity through respect, restraint, and consideration.

2. Digital Communication as a Context of Application

The present study did not collect children's messages or observe their digital behavior. It therefore cannot establish that elementary school children generally communicate through short replies, emojis, delayed responses, or hurried voice messages. These forms may occur in digital communication, but a literature-based study cannot determine their frequency or meaning in actual child-parent interactions.

The reviewed literature instead shows that children's media practices are shaped through interaction with parents. Parental mediation theory treats discussion, guidance, restriction, shared media use, and participatory learning as different ways parents become involved in children's relationships with digital media.²⁰ Research also indicates that mediation practices and their outcomes vary according to children's characteristics, family conditions, and the type of media involved.²¹

An Indonesian study of children aged nine to twelve found that the children perceived parental active involvement and interaction restrictions more frequently than monitoring or technical restrictions. The study concerns the mediation of internet use rather than children's politeness toward parents, so it provides contextual evidence about parental involvement but does not establish specific message patterns.²²

¹⁷Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, vol. 7, commentary on Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23.

¹⁸Al-Zuhayli, *Tafsir al-Munir*, 8:31–32.

¹⁹Afifi and Kurniawan, "Ragam Komunikasi Verbal," 153–170.

²⁰Clark, "Parental Mediation Theory," 325–326.

²¹Livingstone and Helsper, "Parental Mediation," 590–592.

²²Ulfa et al., "Children's Perceptions," 104–106.

Research involving Indonesian parents and adolescents similarly identifies combinations of restrictive and enabling strategies, including monitoring, interpretive mediation, co-use, modeling, and the establishment of family norms. Because that study involved adolescents rather than elementary school children, its findings cannot be transferred directly to the population discussed in this article. It nevertheless shows that digital guidance is more complex than imposing a single rule on children's communication.²³

Turkle's criticism of technology-mediated interaction provides a broader account of the tension between digital connection and sustained conversation. Her work is useful for contextualizing changes in family interaction, but it should not be treated as empirical proof that Indonesian elementary school children communicate disrespectfully.²⁴

These studies therefore support a cautious answer to the second research question. Relevant forms of digital communication include text messages, emojis, voice messages, and video calls. However, the ethical meaning of any particular form depends on its wording, purpose, timing, relationship, and communicative context. A short reply may be appropriate when it clearly answers a simple question, while a longer reply may still be disrespectful if its wording is dismissive or insulting.

3. A Context-Sensitive Framework for Applying *Qaulan Kariman*

The relationship between *qaulan kariman* and digital communication should be formulated as a contextual ethical application. The verse establishes the obligation to honor parents, but it does not explicitly regulate WhatsApp messages, emojis, response times, or voice messages. These contemporary practices must therefore be assessed according to whether they preserve or undermine the ethical purpose of the verse.

A categorical recommendation to avoid emojis cannot be sustained. Research shows that emojis may convey affective and paralinguistic information, but their interpretation is sensitive to linguistic, cultural, relational, and technological contexts. Emojis can clarify a message, supplement its emotional tone, or create ambiguity when their intended meaning is not shared by the sender and recipient.²⁵ The relevant ethical question, therefore, is not whether an emoji is used but whether the resulting message clearly communicates respect.

The same principle applies to response time. Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 does not prescribe immediate digital responses. Delayed replies may result from school activities, sleep, technical limitations, or other reasonable circumstances. A delay becomes ethically relevant when it is deliberately used to ignore, belittle, or distress a parent, or when a time-sensitive message requires acknowledgment. Accordingly, *responsiveness* is a more defensible criterion than a universal requirement for an immediate reply.

²³Purboningsih et al., "Parental Mediation Strategies," 2838.

²⁴Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, chaps. 1–2.

²⁵Qiyu Bai et al., "A Systematic Review of Emoji: Current Research and Future Perspectives," *Frontiers in Psychology* 10 (2019): article 2221, sections "Cultural Diversity" and "Use Inefficiency," <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02221>.

The analysis produces the following framework:

Table 1. A Context-Sensitive Framework for Applying *Qaulan Kariman* to Digital Communication

Normative component	Possible digital application	Necessary qualification
Recognition of parental dignity	Using an appropriate form of address and acknowledging the parent's message	No single term such as "Mom" or "Dad" is universally required; appropriate address varies by family and language
Avoidance of contempt or rebuke	Avoiding insulting, mocking, dismissive, or aggressive wording	Brevity alone does not prove disrespect
Clarity and consideration	Providing enough information for the message to be understood	A complete sentence is not required for every routine exchange
Appropriate emotional tone	Choosing words, punctuation, audio tone, or emojis that do not convey hostility	Emojis may clarify or obscure meaning depending on context
Responsiveness	Acknowledging important messages within a reasonable period	The verse does not establish a fixed response time
Communicative repair	Clarifying, correcting, or apologizing when a message causes misunderstanding	This is a contextual extension of the verse's ethical purpose, not its explicit wording

Source: Authors' analysis.

This framework is not intended as a rigid etiquette checklist. It evaluates the communicative function and relational effect of a message rather than classifying specific digital forms as inherently polite or impolite. This approach also gives children an active role in learning how digitally mediated messages may be interpreted. Clark's concept of participatory learning is relevant here because it treats parents and children as interacting together through digital media rather than positioning children only as passive recipients of rules.²⁶

Evidence from Indonesian children's perceptions of parental mediation supports the importance of communication and guidance, although it does not test a Qur'an-based communication program.²⁷ Research with Indonesian parents and adolescents likewise suggests that families use combinations of modeling, discussion, supervision, and restrictions rather than one uniform strategy.²⁸ Parents can therefore model *qaulan kariman* in their own messages, explain why a message may be misunderstood, and establish family expectations about urgent messages, forms of address, and communication repair.

²⁶Clark, "Parental Mediation Theory," 339–343.

²⁷Ulfa et al., "Children's Perceptions," 104–106.

²⁸Purboningsih et al., "Parental Mediation Strategies," 2838–2859.

Previous Indonesian studies have argued that Qur'anic communication principles can be brought into dialogue with social-media ethics.²⁹ More recent scholarship likewise connects Qur'anic communication ethics with contemporary communication conditions.³⁰ The contribution of the present analysis is narrower: it applies one verse-specific principle to communication from elementary-school-age children toward their parents while distinguishing direct textual meaning from contextual recommendations.

The third research question can therefore be answered through six interrelated criteria: respect for parental dignity, avoidance of contemptuous expression, sufficient clarity, appropriate emotional tone, context-sensitive responsiveness, and communicative repair. These criteria preserve the ethical direction of Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 without presenting contemporary messaging conventions as explicit Qur'anic commands.

D. Conclusion

This study examined the meaning of *qaulan kariman* in Q. al-Isrā' [17]:23 and its relevance to digital communication by elementary-school-age children toward their parents. The verse prohibits expressions of irritation and verbal rebuke and commands children to address their parents with noble and honoring speech. The selected exegetical works interpret this principle in terms of respect, gentleness, restraint, and the preservation of parental dignity.

The reviewed literature shows that children's digital practices are shaped by family communication, parental guidance, shared media use, monitoring, and household norms. However, this literature does not establish that short replies, emojis, delayed responses, or voice messages are inherently disrespectful. Their ethical meaning depends on wording, intention, urgency, relational expectations, and the surrounding communication context.

The relevance of *qaulan kariman* should therefore be formulated through context-sensitive criteria rather than a fixed set of digital communication rules. These criteria include respect for parental dignity, avoidance of contemptuous or aggressive expression, sufficient message clarity, appropriate emotional tone, reasonable responsiveness, and willingness to repair misunderstandings. Respectful forms of address, fuller explanations, appropriate emojis, and timely acknowledgments may support these criteria, but none is universally required in every interaction.

The study is limited by its normative-conceptual design, its focus on one Qur'anic verse and selected exegetical works, and the absence of observations, interviews, or message data from children and parents. It therefore does not describe the prevalence of specific communication practices or test whether the proposed framework changes children's behavior. Future research may examine actual parent-child message exchanges, explore how parents and children interpret politeness differently, or evaluate an educational program based on Qur'anic communication ethics.

²⁹Janah and Yusuf, "Etika Komunikasi di Media Sosial," 101–102.

³⁰Sukmaningtyas et al., "Etika Komunikasi Al-Qur'an," 557.

Declarations

Author Contributions: Rizkira Azzahra Zen contributed to the conceptualization, literature collection, textual analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript. Taj Nazwa Aisyah contributed to the literature review, methodological development, validation of the analysis, and manuscript review and editing. Yuna Aulia Hanifah contributed to the exegetical analysis, validation of the conceptual framework, and manuscript review and editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for its accuracy and integrity.

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Data Availability: No new dataset was generated or analyzed in this study. The study was based on the Qur'anic text, published exegetical works, and scholarly literature identified in the footnotes and bibliography. The cited materials are available through their respective publishers, journals, libraries, or official repositories.

Ethical Clearance: Ethical approval was not required because this study was based exclusively on publicly available textual and bibliographic materials and did not involve human participants, personal data, interviews, observations, or interventions.

Informed Consent: Not applicable. This study did not involve human participants.

Consent for Publication: Not applicable. The manuscript contains no identifiable personal information or participant-generated data.

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