

Prophetic Communication Strategies in the Hadith: A Thematic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication is a fundamental element of teaching, leadership, and interpersonal relationships. This study explores the communication strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through a thematic analysis of authentic Hadith. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study analyzed purposively selected narrations from Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The analysis identified six major communication strategies: (1) audience-centred and clear communication, (2) educational communication through questions, stories, and analogies, (3) reinforcement through repetition, (4) compassionate and motivational communication, (5) effective use of non-verbal communication, and (6) contextual and situational communication. The findings demonstrate that the Prophetic communication model integrates clarity, empathy, educational effectiveness, adaptability, and ethical responsibility. Furthermore, these themes closely align with contemporary theories of communication, education, leadership, and psychology, highlighting the enduring relevance of Prophetic communication in modern contexts. The study contributes to the literature by synthesizing recurring communication strategies into a unified thematic framework and offers practical implications for educators, leaders, counsellors, and religious scholars seeking to promote ethical and effective communication practices.

Keywords: Prophetic Communication; Hadith; Thematic Analysis; Communication Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental process through which individuals exchange ideas, influence behaviour, build relationships, and transmit values across generations. Effective communication extends beyond the mere delivery of information; it involves clarity, empathy, credibility, audience awareness, and ethical responsibility (Littlejohn & Foss, 2021; West & Turner, 2021). In educational, organizational, and leadership contexts, communication is widely recognized as a determinant of successful teaching, decision-making, conflict resolution, and social cohesion (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2025).

In Islam, communication is regarded as both a social etiquette and a moral obligation. The Qur'an repeatedly instructs believers to communicate with truthfulness (*qawlan sadīdan*), gentleness (*qawlan layyinan*), honour (*qawlan karīman*), and wisdom (Qur'an 4:9; 20:44; 17:23; 16:125). These principles were embodied in the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), whose sayings and actions, preserved in the Hadith, provide practical demonstrations of ethical and effective communication. As the primary interpreter of the Qur'anic message, the Prophet (peace be upon him) communicated with diverse audiences—including companions, children, women, tribal leaders, and opponents—using approaches that were context-sensitive, compassionate, persuasive, and intellectually engaging (El-Sharif, 2011).

The Hadith literature contains numerous examples of communication strategies, including the use of questioning, storytelling, analogies, repetition, positive reinforcement, active listening, non-verbal cues, gradual instruction, and adaptation to the audience's level of understanding (Al-Nawawi, 2003; Al-Asqalani, 2000). Many of these approaches correspond with principles identified in contemporary communication and educational theories, such as audience-entered communication, dialogic interaction, emotional intelligence, and experiential learning (Littlejohn & Foss, 2021; Goleman, 2006). This convergence highlights the enduring relevance of Prophetic communication as both a religious and pedagogical model.

Statement of the Problem

Although numerous studies have examined Islamic communication ethics from theological, educational, and leadership perspectives (Kamali, 2002; Mowlana, 2007; Mokodenseho et al., 2024; Ariftha & Mailin, 2026), research specifically synthesizing the communication strategies embedded across authentic Hadith through a systematic thematic analysis remains limited. Existing studies often focus on isolated traits such as honesty, gentleness, or wisdom rather than systematically identifying recurring communication strategies through thematic analysis. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive examination of authentic Hadith to develop a coherent thematic framework of Prophetic communication. Such a framework can contribute to Islamic studies while offering practical insights for educators, leaders, counsellors, and communication scholars seeking ethically grounded communication models for contemporary contexts.

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Identify the major communication strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in authentic Hadith.
- Analyse these strategies through thematic analysis to identify recurring communication patterns.
- Develop a thematic framework of Prophetic communication that contributes to Islamic scholarship and contemporary communication studies.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What communication strategies are employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in authentic Hadith?
2. What major themes emerge from these communication strategies through thematic analysis?
3. How can these themes contribute to contemporary communication theory and professional practice?

By addressing these questions, this study seeks to bridge classical Islamic sources with contemporary communication scholarship, demonstrating that the Prophetic model offers a comprehensive framework grounded in ethical principles, audience awareness, empathy, clarity, and wisdom. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on Islamic communication while providing practical guidance for teaching, leadership, counselling, and interpersonal communication in diverse settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication in the Islamic Perspective

Communication occupies a central position in Islam, serving as the primary means through which divine guidance is conveyed and human relationships are nurtured. Unlike secular perspectives that often emphasize the transmission of information, Islamic communication is rooted in ethical responsibility and accountability before Allah (SWT). The Qur'an presents communication as a moral act, instructing believers to speak truthfully (*qawlan sadīdan*), gently (*qawlan layyīnan*), respectfully (*qawlan karīman*), and wisely (Qur'an 4:9; 20:44; 17:23; 16:125). These principles establish a normative framework in which communication aims not only to inform but also to educate, reconcile, guide, and promote justice.

Scholars have argued that Islamic communication integrates ethical conduct with effective message delivery. According to Hamid Mowlana (2007), communication in Islam is value-oriented, emphasizing responsibility, truthfulness, consultation (*shūrā*), and social harmony rather than persuasion for personal gain. Similarly, Mohammad Hashim Kamali (2002) notes that Islamic ethical principles governing speech are inseparable from broader concepts of justice, trustworthiness, and human dignity. Consequently, communication in Islam is viewed as both a spiritual obligation and a social responsibility.

Prophetic Communication as a Model

The practical manifestation of Islamic communication principles is found in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). As the final messenger, the Prophet communicated divine revelation to people from diverse backgrounds. His communication included preaching, teaching, counselling, negotiation, conflict resolution, family interaction, and leadership. His success in transforming Arabian society has led scholars to regard him as one of history's most influential communicators (Ramadan, 2007).

The Hadith literature demonstrates that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) employed communication strategies suited to the needs and capacities of his audience. Authentic narrations report that he simplified complex ideas through analogies, narrated stories to reinforce moral lessons, repeated important statements for emphasis, answered questions according to the questioner's circumstances, and frequently encouraged dialogue instead of one-way instruction (El-Sharif, 2011; Arjan, 2014; Bilal et al., 2025; Farooq & Mueed, 2025). These approaches reflect flexibility, empathy, and audience-centred communication, characteristics widely recognized in modern communication scholarship (West & Turner, 2022).

Communication Strategies Identified in Previous Studies

Previous studies have explored individual aspects of Prophetic communication from educational, leadership, and Da'wah perspectives. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (1990) emphasizes wisdom (*ḥikmah*), gentleness, and gradual instruction as essential characteristics of Prophetic Da'wah. Likewise, Tariq Ramadan (2007) argues that the Prophet's communication combined compassion with intellectual engagement, enabling him to communicate effectively with individuals of different backgrounds. Research on Prophetic pedagogy has identified several recurring instructional techniques. The Prophet (peace be upon him) frequently employed questioning to stimulate reflection rather than merely providing direct answers. He also used repetition to reinforce key messages, storytelling to enhance retention, analogies to simplify abstract concepts, and practical demonstrations to facilitate learning (Al-Nawawi, 2003; Al-Asqalani, 2000). These methods correspond closely with learner-entered teaching approaches and active learning strategies advocated in contemporary education (Joyce & Calhoun, 2024).

Another frequently discussed characteristic is emotional intelligence in Prophetic communication. The Prophet (peace be upon him) demonstrated empathy by considering the emotional and psychological state of his audience before delivering advice. He adjusted his language according to individual needs, avoided unnecessary criticism, and corrected mistakes with wisdom and kindness. These practices parallel modern theories of emotionally intelligent leadership, which emphasize self-awareness, empathy, relationship management, and social competence (Goleman, 2006).

Research Gap

Despite the substantial literature on Islamic ethics, Prophetic leadership, Da'wah methodology, and Islamic education, research specifically examining communication strategies across authentic Hadith remains fragmented. Existing studies generally discuss isolated characteristics such as gentleness, wisdom, or leadership without systematically identifying recurring communication strategies through a qualitative thematic approach. Given the richness of the Hadith corpus, there remains a significant opportunity to conduct a comprehensive thematic analysis that identifies recurring patterns of Prophetic communication and organizes them into coherent themes. This study seeks to address this gap by systematically analysing authentic Hadith to develop a thematic framework of Prophetic communication strategies applicable to both religious and contemporary educational and professional contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design using thematic analysis to examine the communication strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in authentic Hadith. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring meanings and patterns within textual data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), while thematic analysis provides a systematic method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data Sources

The primary data were drawn from the two most authentic Sunni Hadith collections: Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. These collections were selected because they are widely recognized as the most reliable compilations of the Prophet's traditions (Brown, 2007).

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to select authentic Hadith that demonstrate direct communication involving the Prophet (peace be upon him). The selected narrations included verbal and non-verbal interactions illustrating communication strategies such as questioning, storytelling, explanation, persuasion, consultation, active listening, encouragement, correction, conflict resolution, and audience adaptation. Hadith dealing solely with legal rulings or ritual practices without significant communicative interaction were excluded.

Data Analysis

The selected Hadith were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: (1) Familiarization with the selected Hadith and their contexts, (2) Coding communication behaviours demonstrated by the Prophet (peace be upon him), (3) Grouping similar codes into broader themes, (4) Reviewing and refining the themes, (5) Defining and naming each communication strategy, and (6) Interpreting the findings in relation to Islamic scholarship and contemporary communication theory. This approach enabled the identification of recurring communication patterns while ensuring a transparent analytical process.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of authentic Hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* identified six major communication strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These themes illustrate that the Prophet's communication was audience-centered, educational, compassionate, interactive, and context-sensitive. The themes are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Major Themes of Prophetic Communication Strategies

Theme	Description
1. Audience-Centered and Clear Communication	Adapting messages to the audience while maintaining clarity and simplicity
2. Educational Communication through Questions, Stories, and Analogies	Promoting understanding through interactive and illustrative teaching methods
3. Reinforcement through Repetition	Emphasizing important messages through purposeful repetition
4. Compassionate and Motivational Communication	Communicating with empathy, respect, encouragement, and positive reinforcement
5. Effective Use of Non-verbal Communication	Reinforcing verbal messages through gestures, facial expressions, silence, and demonstrations
6. Contextual and Situational Communication	Adjusting communication according to circumstances and audience needs

Theme 1: Audience-Centred and Clear Communication

The analysis revealed that the Prophet (peace be upon him) consistently adapted his communication according to the listener's knowledge, age, and circumstances while maintaining clarity and simplicity. "Make things easy and do not make them difficult; give glad tidings and do not drive people away" (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Sahih Muslim, n.d.). This narration illustrates the Prophet's emphasis on communicating in a manner appropriate to the audience's capacity, prioritizing clarity, accessibility, and encouragement. The Prophet used to speak so clearly that if someone wished to count his words, he could do so. This demonstrates deliberate clarity and measured speech.

Theme 2: Educational Communication through Questions, Stories, and Analogies

The analysis showed that the Prophet (peace be upon him) frequently employed questions, stories, and analogies to promote understanding and stimulate critical thinking. Rather than merely delivering information, he engaged his audience through interactive teaching methods that encouraged reflection. The Prophet asked, "Do you know who is the bankrupt?" The companions replied, "The bankrupt among us is the one who has neither money nor property." He then explained that the true bankrupt is the one who comes on the Day of Judgment with good deeds but has wronged others (Sahih Muslim, n.d.). This narration demonstrates the use of questioning to challenge existing assumptions before introducing a deeper moral lesson. Similarly, the Prophet said, "The example of the believer who recites the Qur'an is like a citron: its fragrance is pleasant and its taste is pleasant" (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Sahih

Muslim, n.d.). By employing analogies drawn from everyday life, the Prophet simplified abstract spiritual concepts and enhanced their retention among listeners.

Theme 3: Reinforcement through Repetition

The findings indicate that repetition was a deliberate communication strategy used by the Prophet (peace be upon him) to emphasize important messages and ensure their retention. Significant teachings were often repeated to draw attention to their importance. Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that when the Prophet spoke, he would repeat his words three times so that they could be understood, and when he greeted people, he repeated the greeting three times (Al-Bukhari, n.d.). Likewise, the Prophet repeatedly warned against major sins by saying, "Shall I inform you of the gravest of the major sins?" After repeating the question three times, he highlighted associating partners with Allah and disobedience to parents before emphasizing false testimony (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Sahih Muslim, n.d.). These narrations illustrate that repetition served as an instructional technique to reinforce learning and highlight the significance of key messages.

Theme 4: Compassionate and Motivational Communication

Compassion and encouragement emerged as defining characteristics of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) communication. His interactions consistently reflected kindness, empathy, and concern for the emotional well-being of others while motivating them toward positive behaviour. The Prophet said, "The merciful are shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth, and the One above the heavens will have mercy upon you" (Al-Tirmidhi, n.d.). This statement reflects the Prophet's emphasis on compassion as a guiding principle of interpersonal communication. Likewise, he instructed, "Make things easy and do not make them difficult; give glad tidings and do not drive people away" (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Sahih Muslim, n.d.). These narrations demonstrate that the Prophet preferred encouragement and positive reinforcement over harshness, thereby fostering motivation and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Theme 5: Effective Use of Non-verbal Communication

The analysis found that the Prophet (peace be upon him) effectively integrated non-verbal communication with spoken messages. His gestures, facial expressions, silence, and practical demonstrations reinforced verbal instruction and enhanced audience understanding. Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet said, "The believer to another believer is like a building, each part supporting the other," and then interlocked the fingers of both hands (Al-Bukhari, n.d.; Sahih Muslim, n.d.). The physical gesture strengthened the meaning of unity and mutual support among believers.

Theme 6: Contextual and Situational Communication

The findings further demonstrate that the Prophet (peace be upon him) adapted his communication according to the context, audience, and circumstances. His responses varied depending on the individual's situation, level of understanding, and immediate needs. On one occasion, a man repeatedly sought permission to commit adultery. The Prophet engaged him in a thoughtful dialogue by asking whether he would approve of such an act for his own mother, daughter, or sister. The man replied in the negative, and the Prophet concluded the conversation by praying for him (Ahmad, n.d.). This narration illustrates the Prophet's way to address sensitive issues through reasoned dialogue suited to the individual's circumstances.

DISCUSSION

This study identified six major communication strategies employed by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): (1) audience-centered and clear communication, (2) educational communication through

questions, stories, and analogies, (3) reinforcement through repetition, (4) compassionate and motivational communication, (5) effective use of non-verbal communication, and (6) contextual and situational communication. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Prophetic communication integrates ethical principles with effective pedagogical and interpersonal practices, many of which correspond with contemporary communication and educational theories.

The first theme, audience-centered and clear communication, highlights the Prophet's practice of adapting his message according to the listener's knowledge, circumstances, and level of understanding. This finding aligns with audience-centered communication theory, which emphasizes tailoring messages to the needs and characteristics of the audience (Littlejohn & Foss, 2021). The Prophet's instruction to "make things easy and do not make them difficult" further reflects the Qur'anic principle of communicating with wisdom and kindness (Qur'an 16:125).

The second theme, educational communication through questions, stories, and analogies, demonstrates the Prophet's learner-centered approach to teaching. By encouraging reflection through questioning and explaining concepts using familiar analogies, he actively engaged his audience in the learning process. These findings are consistent with constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active process of meaning-making (Bruner, 1974), and with narrative communication theory, which recognizes storytelling as an effective tool for enhancing understanding and memory (Green & Brock, 2000). Previous studies have similarly identified questioning and analogies as prominent features of Prophetic pedagogy (Ramadan, 2007).

The third theme, reinforcement through repetition, indicates that repetition was intentionally used to strengthen understanding and improve retention of important teachings. This finding corresponds with cognitive psychology, which identifies repetition as a key factor in memory consolidation and long-term learning (Baddeley, 2025). Similarly, Mayer (2022) emphasizes reinforcement as an effective instructional strategy for improving knowledge retention. The repeated emphasis observed in the Hadith therefore reflects a deliberate educational practice rather than simple redundancy.

The fourth theme, compassionate and motivational communication, reveals that the Prophet combined empathy, encouragement, and respect with guidance. These findings are consistent with Goleman's (2006) concept of emotional intelligence, which highlights empathy and relationship management as essential communication competencies. Likewise, transformational leadership theory identifies inspiration, individualized consideration, and positive motivation as characteristics of effective leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The fifth theme, effective use of non-verbal communication, demonstrates that the Prophet reinforced verbal messages through gestures, facial expressions, silence, and practical demonstrations. This finding supports communication research showing that non-verbal behaviours significantly enhance message clarity, credibility, and emotional impact (Knapp et al., 2014). The Prophet's use of symbolic gestures illustrates how non-verbal communication can strengthen understanding and make abstract concepts more meaningful.

Finally, contextual and situational communication illustrates the Prophet's way to adapt his communication according to the audience and circumstances while maintaining consistent ethical principles. This finding aligns with situational leadership theory, which emphasizes adapting communication styles to different contexts (Hersey et al., 2013), and communication accommodation theory, which explains how speakers modify their communication to improve understanding and interpersonal relationships (Giles, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the communication strategies of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through a thematic analysis of authentic Hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Six major themes

emerged: audience-centred and clear communication, educational communication through questions, stories, and analogies, reinforcement through repetition, compassionate and motivational communication, effective use of non-verbal communication, and contextual and situational communication. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Prophetic communication represents a comprehensive model integrating clarity, education, empathy, non-verbal expression, and contextual awareness. The strong alignment between these themes and contemporary theories of communication, education, leadership, and psychology underscores the continued relevance of the Prophetic model in modern educational, organizational, counselling, and leadership contexts.

By synthesizing recurring communication strategies into a unified thematic framework, this study contributes to the existing literature on Islamic communication and provides an evidence-based foundation for understanding the enduring effectiveness of Prophetic communication. The findings highlight that ethical communication, when combined with audience awareness and pedagogical sensitivity, can foster understanding, strengthen relationships, and facilitate meaningful behavioural change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the present study, it is recommended that educators, trainers, religious scholars, counsellors, and organizational leaders incorporate Prophetic communication principles into their professional practices to promote ethical and effective communication. Future research may expand the analysis by examining communication strategies across other authentic Hadith collections, employing mixed-methods or comparative research designs, or investigating the application of Prophetic communication principles in contemporary educational, organizational, healthcare, and digital communication settings.

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