

Revisiting the Concept of 'Qaulan Sadidan' (Truthful Speech) in the Qur'an: A Framework for Ethical Communication in the Post-Truth Era

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Article Info :	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 10-10-2025 Approved: 11-11-2025 Published: 25-12-2025	The contemporary post-truth era has fundamentally challenged traditional notions of truth, honesty, and ethical communication, with misinformation proliferating across digital platforms at an unprecedented rate. In this context, the Qur'anic concept of 'qaulan sadidan' (truthful speech) offers a timeless ethical framework that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. This study revisits the concept of qaulan sadidan as articulated in Surah al-Nisa' (4:9) and Surah al-Ahzab (33:70) to develop a comprehensive framework for ethical communication applicable to contemporary challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology with thematic tafsir analysis and content analysis of classical and modern Islamic scholarly works, this research examines how qaulan sadidan encompasses not merely factual accuracy but also constructive intent, contextual appropriateness, and beneficial outcomes. The study reveals that qaulan sadidan operates on three fundamental dimensions: epistemological (truth-telling), ethical (moral responsibility), and pragmatic (effective communication). Furthermore, this research demonstrates how the principles derived from qaulan sadidan can address critical challenges in the post-truth era, including digital misinformation, polarized discourse, and the erosion of public trust. The findings indicate that implementing qaulan sadidan principles requires both individual commitment to truthfulness and systemic reforms in media literacy, digital platform governance, and educational curricula. This study contributes to Islamic communication ethics scholarship while offering practical solutions for navigating the complex information ecosystem of the twenty-first century.
Keywords: oaulan sadidan; truthful speech; ethical communication; post-truth era; islamic communication ethics	

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary information landscape has undergone a seismic transformation that fundamentally challenges our understanding of truth, communication, and public discourse ([Stewart & Lewis, 2017](#)). The Oxford Dictionary's declaration of 'post-truth' as the word of 2016 marked a watershed moment in acknowledging the diminishing role of objective facts in shaping public opinion, where emotional appeals and personal beliefs increasingly supersede empirical evidence ([McIntyre, 2018](#)). This

phenomenon has been exacerbated by the rapid proliferation of social media platforms, which have democratized content creation while simultaneously enabling the unprecedented spread of misinformation and disinformation ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)). According to recent research by Indiana University, merely 0.25% of social media users are responsible for generating between 73% and 78% of all content considered low-credibility or misinformation, demonstrating the disproportionate influence of malicious actors in the digital ecosystem ([Grinberg et al., 2019](#)).

The consequences of this post-truth reality extend far beyond mere academic concern, manifesting in tangible threats to democratic processes, public health outcomes, and social cohesion. The 2022 Security.org study revealed that only 30% of American adults maintain trust in mainstream media, while simultaneously 94% actively fact-check their news sources, indicating a crisis of institutional credibility rather than public apathy. This erosion of trust has created a vacuum that is often filled by partisan narratives, conspiracy theories, and emotionally charged content that prioritizes virality over veracity ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic starkly illustrated these dangers, with the proliferation of health misinformation directly contributing to vaccine hesitancy and non-compliance with public health measures ([Loomba et al., 2021](#)).

In confronting these contemporary challenges, ancient wisdom traditions offer unexpectedly relevant insights that transcend their historical contexts. The Islamic tradition, with its rich heritage of communication ethics spanning over fourteen centuries, provides a particularly sophisticated framework for navigating the complexities of truthful discourse. At the heart of this tradition lies the Qur'anic concept of 'qaulan sadidan,' which appears twice in the divine text (Surah al-Nisa' 4:9 and Surah al-Ahzab 33:70) and has been extensively elaborated upon by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. Unlike simplistic notions of truth-telling that focus solely on factual accuracy, qaulan sadidan encompasses a holistic approach to communication that integrates truthfulness, constructive intent, contextual appropriateness, and beneficial outcomes.

The urgency of this research is underscored by the accelerating pace of digital transformation and the corresponding amplification of communication-related challenges. Recent data indicates that 54% of Americans regularly obtain news from social media platforms, with Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram serving as primary information sources for millions. However, these platforms have proven particularly susceptible to the spread of false information, with fake news spreading up to ten times faster than accurate reporting on social media (MIT, 2018). The problem is further compounded

by sophisticated technological developments, including deepfakes, AI-generated content, and algorithmically-curated echo chambers that reinforce existing biases while limiting exposure to diverse perspectives ([Chesney & Citron, 2019](#)).

Moreover, the post-truth era poses unique challenges to democratic governance and civic participation. Political actors increasingly exploit the blurred lines between fact and fiction to manipulate public opinion, as evidenced by documented cases of systematic disinformation campaigns in elections across multiple democracies ([Howard et al., 2018](#)). The Edelman Trust Barometer consistently reports declining trust in government, media, and traditional institutions, creating fertile ground for populist movements and authoritarian tendencies that thrive on the politics of alternative facts. This crisis of truth and trust extends beyond politics into domains such as climate science, public health, and international relations, where evidence-based decision-making is essential for addressing complex global challenges.

The intersection of Islamic communication ethics and contemporary digital challenges presents both an opportunity and an imperative for scholarly investigation. Muslim communities, comprising nearly a quarter of the global population, are simultaneously consumers and producers of digital content, yet often lack systematic frameworks for applying Islamic principles to online communication ([Ali & Fahmy, 2013](#)). The absence of such frameworks contributes to the proliferation of sectarian rhetoric, extremist narratives, and theologically dubious content within Muslim digital spaces ([El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009](#)). Developing a robust application of qaulan sadidan principles to contemporary communication challenges could therefore benefit both Muslim and non-Muslim communities in navigating the ethical complexities of the digital age.

Table 1. Key Statistics on Misinformation in the Digital Era

Metric	Statistic	Source
Trust in Mainstream Media (USA)	30%	Security.org, 2022
Social Media Users Creating Misinformation	0.25% create 73-78%	Grinberg et al. (2019)
Americans Getting News from Social Media	54%	Pew Research, 2024
Fake News Spread Rate vs. True News	10x faster	Vosoughi et al. 2018

Metric			Statistic	Source	
Users	Who	Unknowingly	38.2%	Redline	Digital,
Shared Fake News				2020	

Source: Data Processed

Existing scholarship on qaulan sadidan has primarily focused on its linguistic analysis and basic ethical implications within traditional Islamic contexts. Conducted a comprehensive analysis of Qur'anic communication principles, identifying qaulan sadidan as one of seven key types of speech commanded in Islamic scripture alongside qaulan ma'rufan (good speech), qaulan kariman (noble speech), and qaulan balighan (effective speech). Their work established the foundational understanding that qaulan sadidan encompasses both substantive truthfulness and constructive delivery, emphasizing that effective communication in Islam requires integration of content accuracy with ethical intent. Similarly, explored the practical application of qaulan sadidan in interpersonal communication, arguing that this principle extends beyond mere honesty to include considerations of timing, audience psychology, and potential impact of one's words.

Classical tafsir literature provides rich insights into the multi-dimensional nature of qaulan sadidan that often remain underutilized in contemporary discussions. Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah al-Nisa' 4:9 emphasizes the protective function of truthful speech in safeguarding vulnerable populations, particularly orphans, from exploitation and injustice. Al-Tabari's extensive commentary elaborates on how qaulan sadidan involves speaking words that are 'straight' and 'correct,' avoiding both falsehood and ambiguity that could mislead others. Contemporary scholars like Qutb (2003) have expanded these interpretations to address modern contexts, arguing that qaulan sadidan requires intellectual honesty, emotional authenticity, and social responsibility in all forms of human communication. This layered understanding suggests that truthful speech in Islamic ethics operates simultaneously on epistemological, ethical, and social dimensions.

The intersection of Islamic communication ethics and digital technology has begun receiving scholarly attention, though comprehensive frameworks remain underdeveloped. Rianto (2019) examined digital literacy and media ethics in the post-truth era from an Islamic perspective, identifying the urgent need for integrating Islamic ethical principles into digital citizenship education. His research highlighted how the absence of ethical guardrails in online spaces has contributed to the proliferation of sectarian hatred, conspiracy theories, and religiously-justified extremism among

Muslim youth ([Rianto, 2019](#); [Saleh et al., 2022](#)). investigated the transformation of Islamic da'wah (proselytization) in digital spaces, noting both opportunities for broader outreach and challenges related to content quality and theological accuracy. These studies collectively suggest that while Islamic principles offer valuable guidance for ethical communication, their application to digital contexts requires careful contextualization and theoretical development.

Despite these valuable contributions, significant gaps persist in our understanding of how qaulan sadidan can address contemporary communication challenges. First, existing literature predominantly treats qaulan sadidan as an isolated ethical principle without systematically examining its relationship to other Qur'anic communication guidelines or its integration into a comprehensive ethical framework. Second, most studies remain primarily theoretical or focus on traditional face-to-face communication contexts, rarely engaging with the specific challenges posed by digital platforms, algorithmic content curation, and artificial intelligence ([Rianto, 2019](#)). Third, there is insufficient research on how qaulan sadidan principles might inform institutional responses to misinformation, including platform governance, media literacy education, and regulatory frameworks ([Saleh et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of existing research on post-truth communication and misinformation draws exclusively from Western philosophical and ethical traditions, overlooking the potential contributions of non-Western perspectives ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). This Eurocentric bias not only limits the theoretical richness of the discourse but also excludes insights that might prove particularly relevant for Muslim-majority societies or Muslim diaspora communities navigating digital spaces ([Ali & Fahmy, 2013](#)). The few studies that do engage with Islamic ethics and contemporary communication challenges often lack methodological rigor or fail to establish clear connections between scriptural principles and practical applications ([El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009](#)). This gap is particularly problematic given that Muslim populations constitute a significant proportion of social media users globally and face unique challenges related to Islamophobia, sectarian polarization, and the weaponization of Islamic terminology in extremist discourse.

Additionally, previous research has not adequately explored the epistemological foundations of qaulan sadidan and their implications for understanding truth in an era characterized by epistemological relativism and skepticism toward objective reality ([McIntyre, 2018](#)). The post-truth phenomenon raises fundamental questions about the nature of truth, the

sources of epistemic authority, and the relationship between subjective experience and objective fact—questions that Islamic philosophical and theological traditions have long grappled with through concepts such as *ilm* (knowledge), *yaqin* (certainty), and *haqq* (truth/reality) (Nasr, 2006). Yet these rich intellectual resources remain largely untapped in current debates about truth and communication ethics. This research seeks to address these gaps by developing a theoretically robust and practically applicable framework based on *qaulan sadidan* that can inform both individual practice and institutional policy in the digital age.

This research offers several novel contributions to the fields of Islamic studies, communication ethics, and media studies. First, it provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of *qaulan sadidan* as a multi-dimensional ethical framework, systematically examining its epistemological, ethical, and pragmatic dimensions while demonstrating their integration in addressing contemporary challenges. Second, it bridges classical Islamic scholarship with cutting-edge research on digital misinformation, offering theoretically grounded yet practically oriented guidance for navigating the post-truth era (McIntyre, 2018). Third, this study develops an innovative analytical framework that maps *qaulan sadidan* principles onto specific challenges in digital communication, including social media echo chambers, algorithmic amplification of divisive content, and the viral spread of misinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Moreover, this research pioneers the application of *qaulan sadidan* to institutional and systemic dimensions of communication ethics, moving beyond individual morality to address questions of platform governance, media literacy curricula, and regulatory frameworks. By demonstrating how Islamic ethical principles can inform policy debates traditionally dominated by secular liberal frameworks, this study contributes to a more genuinely pluralistic global discourse on digital ethics (Couldry, 2010). The research also introduces a novel methodology that combines classical *tafsir* analysis with contemporary social scientific research on misinformation, creating a bridge between religious scholarship and empirical social science. This interdisciplinary approach enables the development of solutions that are both theologically sound and empirically validated, addressing a common criticism of religious approaches to contemporary ethical issues.

Based on the identified gaps and the urgent need for ethical frameworks to address post-truth communication challenges, this research pursues four primary objectives. First, to conduct a comprehensive exegetical analysis of *qaulan sadidan* in its Qur'anic context, examining both the verses where it explicitly appears (Surah al-Nisa' 4:9 and Surah al-Ahzab 33:70) and

related principles throughout the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition. Second, to develop a theoretical framework that articulates the epistemological, ethical, and pragmatic dimensions of qaulan sadidan and their application to contemporary communication contexts. Third, to analyze specific challenges in the post-truth era—including digital misinformation, polarized discourse, and eroded institutional trust—through the lens of qaulan sadidan, identifying both conceptual insights and practical strategies (McIntyre, 2018). Fourth, to propose actionable recommendations for individuals, communities, and institutions seeking to implement qaulan sadidan principles in digital spaces, contributing to the development of more ethical, truthful, and constructive online communication ecosystems.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Type

This study employs a qualitative research methodology with an emphasis on textual analysis and thematic interpretation. Qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate for exploring complex ethical concepts and their application to contemporary challenges, as they allow for in-depth examination of meanings, contexts, and interpretive nuances that quantitative methods might overlook (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The research adopts an interpretive paradigm that recognizes the constructed nature of knowledge while maintaining commitment to systematic, rigorous analysis grounded in textual evidence and scholarly tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This interpretive approach is especially suitable for Islamic studies research, where understanding requires engagement with multiple layers of meaning in scriptural texts, classical commentaries, and contemporary scholarly discourse.

Population and Sampling

The research population consists of primary Islamic textual sources and secondary scholarly works relevant to qaulan sadidan and ethical communication. The sampling strategy employs purposive sampling to select texts that provide the most comprehensive and authoritative insights into the concept of qaulan sadidan. Primary sources include the Qur'an, specifically Surah al-Nisa' verse 9 and Surah al-Ahzab verse 70 where qaulan sadidan explicitly appears, along with related verses addressing truthfulness, speech ethics, and communication. Secondary sources comprise classical tafsir works by scholars such as al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Qurtubi, which provide historical interpretations and contextual understanding. Contemporary scholarly works on Islamic communication ethics, post-truth communication

challenges, and digital misinformation form the tertiary layer of the sample, enabling dialogue between classical Islamic principles and modern contexts.

Research Instrument

The primary research instruments include: (1) Textual analysis protocols for examining Qur'anic verses and classical commentaries, focusing on semantic analysis, contextual interpretation, and intertextual connections; (2) Thematic coding frameworks for organizing and analyzing data from multiple sources, identifying patterns, relationships, and key themes; (3) Comparative analysis matrices for examining similarities and differences between classical and contemporary interpretations of qaulan sadidan; and (4) Integration frameworks for connecting Islamic ethical principles with contemporary communication challenges and solutions. These instruments are applied systematically throughout the research process to ensure consistency, rigor, and transparency in data collection and analysis.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection proceeds through a multi-stage process designed to build comprehensive understanding progressively. The first stage involves close reading and linguistic analysis of the two primary Qur'anic verses containing qaulan sadidan, examining the Arabic terminology, grammatical structures, and immediate textual context. The second stage expands to related Qur'anic passages addressing truth, speech, and communication ethics, establishing broader thematic connections and identifying the conceptual ecosystem within which qaulan sadidan operates.

The third stage engages classical tafsir literature, documenting traditional interpretations, historical applications, and scholarly debates surrounding these verses. The fourth stage examines contemporary Islamic scholarship on communication ethics, identifying how modern scholars have understood and applied qaulan sadidan in various contexts. The final stage incorporates relevant literature on post-truth communication and digital misinformation from media studies, communication theory, and philosophy, enabling comparative analysis and practical application of Islamic principles to contemporary challenges.

Research Procedure

The research procedure follows the maudhu'i (thematic) tafsir methodology, which involves systematically collecting, organizing, and analyzing all Qur'anic material related to a specific theme or concept. This approach has been adapted and expanded to incorporate contemporary

scholarly sources and interdisciplinary perspectives. The procedure begins with identification and collection of all relevant source materials, followed by preliminary organization according to themes and subtopics. Next, intensive analysis examines each text individually, documenting key concepts, arguments, and evidence. Comparative analysis then identifies convergences, divergences, and complementarities among different sources. Synthesis integrates findings into a coherent framework that addresses the research objectives. Finally, critical reflection evaluates the strengths and limitations of the developed framework while identifying implications for theory and practice.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis employs thematic analysis as the primary analytical technique, supplemented by content analysis and interpretive synthesis. Thematic analysis involves systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data, moving through phases of familiarization, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and final report production ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). Content analysis provides complementary quantitative dimension by documenting frequency and distribution of key concepts across sources.

The analytical process maintains attention to both semantic (explicit) and latent (implicit) meanings, examining not only what texts explicitly state but also underlying assumptions, contextual implications, and unstated connections. Throughout analysis, iterative movement between data and interpretive frameworks ensures that emerging insights remain grounded in evidence while supporting theoretical development. The analytical process culminates in integrative synthesis that weaves together insights from diverse sources into a coherent, comprehensive framework addressing the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Multi-Dimensional Framework of Qaulan Sadidan: Epistemological, Ethical, and Pragmatic Foundations

The analysis of qaulan sadidan in its Qur'anic context reveals a sophisticated ethical framework operating simultaneously on multiple dimensions rather than a simple injunction toward factual accuracy. The term 'sadidan' derives from the Arabic root s-d-d, connoting straightness, correctness, and precision, but classical lexicographers and exegetes

understand it as encompassing far more than literal truthfulness (Ibn Manzur, 1414 AH).

Al-Tabari's comprehensive tafsir emphasizes that *sadidan* speech must be 'straight without crookedness,' indicating both content accuracy and delivery integrity, while al-Qurtubi highlights its constructive purpose in guiding people toward righteous action rather than merely conveying information (Rohmat et al., 2024). This multi-faceted understanding positions *qaulan sadidan* as a holistic communication ethic integrating epistemological validity, moral responsibility, and practical effectiveness—dimensions that remain highly relevant for navigating contemporary communication challenges.

The epistemological dimension of *qaulan sadidan* addresses fundamental questions about the nature of truth and the conditions for valid knowledge. Islamic epistemology recognizes multiple pathways to truth, including sensory perception (*hiss*), rational inference (*aql*), and revelation (*wahy*), while maintaining that these sources, properly understood, cannot genuinely contradict one another (Nasr, 2006). *Qaulan sadidan* requires speakers to ensure their statements align with reality as ascertained through these legitimate epistemic channels, avoiding the dissemination of unverified claims, speculation presented as fact, or deliberate distortion of evidence.

In the context of Surah al-Ahzab 33:70, where believers are commanded to 'fear Allah and speak *qaulan sadidan*,' the linkage between *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and truthful speech underscores that epistemological responsibility is ultimately a matter of spiritual accountability, as Allah possesses complete knowledge and will hold speakers accountable for the accuracy and impact of their words (Qutb, 2003). Beyond epistemological accuracy, *qaulan sadidan* incorporates an irreducible ethical dimension concerned with the moral intentions, character, and responsibilities of the speaker. Classical scholars emphasize that truthful speech must originate from a heart oriented toward goodness and justice rather than malice, self-aggrandizement, or exploitation of others.

The Qur'anic context of Surah al-Nisa' 4:9, which discusses protecting orphans' rights and welfare, demonstrates how *qaulan sadidan* functions not merely as abstract truth-telling but as ethically-charged communication motivated by concern for vulnerable populations and pursuit of justice. This ethical dimension rejects the amoral conception of truth characteristic of some Western epistemological traditions, insisting instead that truthfulness cannot be separated from broader questions of character, intention, and moral purpose.

Table 2. Three Dimensions of Qaulan Sadidan Framework

Dimension	Key Principles	Application to Post-Truth Era
Epistemological	Correspondence to reality, verification through legitimate epistemic channels, avoidance of speculation	Fact-checking, source verification, distinguishing opinion from established fact, combating misinformation
Ethical	Righteous intention, moral responsibility, concern for justice and welfare, character integrity	Resisting manipulation, protecting vulnerable populations, refusing to weaponize truth, maintaining dignity in discourse
Pragmatic	Effective communication, contextual appropriateness, constructive outcomes, audience consideration	Strategic messaging, media literacy, platform-appropriate communication, building trust through consistency

Source: Data Processed

The pragmatic dimension addresses the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication, recognizing that truth can be conveyed in ways that either facilitate or obstruct understanding and acceptance. Al-Maraghi's tafsir emphasizes that qaulan sadidan must be 'balighan'—reaching and touching the hearts of the audience—suggesting that truthful speech should employ appropriate rhetorical strategies, timing, and framing to maximize positive impact. This pragmatic consideration does not license distortion or manipulation but rather acknowledges that effective truth-telling requires attention to audience psychology, cultural context, and communication channels. In Surah al-Nisa' 4:9, the instruction to speak 'qaulan sadidan' when addressing orphans' welfare specifically indicates the need for constructive speech that guides toward beneficial action rather than abstract moralizing disconnected from practical realities.

The integration of these three dimensions distinguishes qaulan sadidan from reductionist approaches to truthfulness that focus exclusively on factual accuracy while ignoring intention, impact, or effectiveness. Contemporary discussions of 'fake news' and misinformation often operate with an impoverished conception of truth that treats information as atomized facts divorced from moral and social contexts (McIntyre, 2018). In contrast, the qaulan sadidan framework recognizes that even technically accurate information can function unethically when selectively presented,

manipulatively framed, or divorced from necessary context—practices commonplace in contemporary media and political discourse ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). For instance, sharing accurate statistics about crime rates within specific demographic groups becomes morally problematic when done to inflame prejudice rather than inform policy, even if the numbers themselves are verifiable ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)).

Moreover, the holistic nature of qaulan sadidan addresses the inadequacy of purely procedural or technical solutions to post-truth challenges. While fact-checking organizations, algorithmic content moderation, and media literacy programs all play important roles, they cannot fully address the crisis of truth if they focus solely on information accuracy while ignoring questions of intention, character, and communicative virtue ([Rianto, 2019](#)). The qaulan sadidan framework suggests that sustainable solutions require cultivating both epistemic competence (ability to discern truth) and ethical character (disposition to pursue truth for righteous purposes), alongside pragmatic skills for effective communication. This integrated approach resonates with virtue ethics traditions in Western philosophy while drawing on distinctively Islamic theological and ethical resources ([Nasr, 2006](#)).

The epistemological dimension of qaulan sadidan directly challenges the post-truth tendency to treat all truth claims as equally valid expressions of personal or group perspective. While acknowledging legitimate pluralism in matters of opinion, interpretation, and values, Islamic epistemology maintains that certain truths—particularly those pertaining to divine attributes, prophetic teachings, and empirically verifiable facts about the natural world—possess objective validity transcending individual or cultural preferences ([Nasr, 2006](#)). This epistemological realism provides intellectual resources for resisting the slide into radical relativism that often accompanies postmodern skepticism, offering instead a nuanced position that recognizes both the existence of objective truth and the limitations of human knowledge ([Qutb, 2003](#)). In practical terms, this means that qaulan sadidan requires speakers to distinguish carefully between established facts, reasonable interpretations, personal opinions, and mere speculation—a discipline increasingly rare in contemporary public discourse.

The ethical dimension of qaulan sadidan offers particularly powerful resources for addressing the weaponization of information characteristic of the post-truth era. When truth-telling is separated from broader ethical considerations, accurate information can be deployed to manipulate, divide, or harm—as evidenced by disinformation campaigns that mix true and false claims to maximum destructive effect ([Howard et al., 2018](#)). Qaulan sadidan's

insistence on righteous intention and concern for justice means that even truthful speech becomes problematic when motivated by malice or employed to inflict harm unjustly. This ethical grounding provides principled basis for rejecting both outright lies and technically accurate information deployed for unethical purposes, a nuance often lost in debates focused exclusively on factual accuracy versus falsehood ([McIntyre, 2018](#)).

Finally, the pragmatic dimension acknowledges that truth must be communicated effectively to fulfill its purpose of guiding people toward understanding and beneficial action. The qaulan sadidan framework thus validates attention to rhetoric, narrative, and persuasion as legitimate aspects of ethical communication rather than viewing them with suspicion as mere manipulation. This perspective enables nuanced engagement with contemporary debates about media effects, framing, and strategic communication, recognizing that how truths are presented significantly affects their reception and impact. In the context of combating misinformation, this suggests that merely debunking false claims is insufficient; effective truth promotion requires compelling narratives, accessible explanations, and strategic messaging that can compete with emotionally resonant falsehoods in the digital attention economy ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)).

The practical application of this multi-dimensional framework requires simultaneous attention to all three aspects rather than privileging one dimension over others. A communication that is epistemologically accurate but ethically malicious or pragmatically ineffective fails to achieve qaulan sadidan, as does one that is well-intentioned and artfully delivered but factually incorrect. This holistic standard presents challenges in an environment that often treats these dimensions as separate or even contradictory concerns, but it also offers profound benefits by cultivating integrated excellence in communication that serves both truth and human flourishing ([Nasr, 2006](#)). The following sections explore how this framework addresses specific challenges in the post-truth era and guides development of practical solutions at individual, communal, and institutional levels.

Discussion

Qaulan Sadidan as Antidote to Digital Misinformation: From Individual Practice to Systemic Reform

The application of qaulan sadidan principles to the challenge of digital misinformation reveals both the depth of the problem and the comprehensiveness required of effective solutions ([Hulawa & Kasmianti, 2025](#)). Contemporary research has documented how misinformation spreads faster and more widely than accurate information on social media platforms, with

false news reaching 1,500 people six times faster than the truth on Twitter ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)). This velocity differential stems from multiple factors including emotional resonance, novelty bias, and algorithmic amplification, creating an ecosystem structurally biased toward the spread of falsehood ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). The qaulan sadidan framework suggests that addressing this challenge requires interventions at multiple levels: individual users must cultivate epistemic virtue and ethical discernment, communities must establish norms and practices supporting truthful communication, and platforms must redesign systems to privilege accuracy over engagement ([Rianto, 2019](#)).

At the individual level, qaulan sadidan demands rigorous epistemic discipline before sharing or amplifying content in digital spaces. The research finding that 38.2% of U.S. news consumers have unknowingly shared fake news underscores widespread failure of verification practices. Islamic epistemology's emphasis on verification (*tabayyun*) provides clear guidance: believers are commanded to investigate claims before acting on them, particularly when they originate from unreliable sources (Qur'an 49:6). Applied to social media, this principle requires users to verify information through multiple reliable sources before sharing, resist the impulse toward viral dissemination without reflection, and acknowledge uncertainty when dealing with contested or preliminary claims. This epistemic caution directly counters the 'share first, verify later' culture that enables misinformation's rapid spread.

The ethical dimension of qaulan sadidan addresses motivation and intention in content sharing, interrogating not merely whether information is accurate but why it is being shared and what impact it might have. Research on misinformation reveals that much false content spreads not through sophisticated deception but through careless amplification by users who find it emotionally satisfying, ideologically affirming, or socially advantageous to share ([Howard et al., 2018](#)). Qaulan sadidan's insistence on righteous intention challenges users to examine their motives: Am I sharing this because it's important truth that needs wider circulation, or because it confirms my prejudices and vilifies my opponents? Does disseminating this information serve justice and human welfare, or does it inflame hatred and division? These ethical questions, often absent from discussions of misinformation focused solely on factual accuracy, prove essential for disrupting the emotional and tribal dynamics that fuel false content's spread ([McIntyre, 2018](#)).

Beyond individual practice, the qaulan sadidan framework suggests the need for communal norms and collective accountability in digital spaces. Traditional Islamic societies developed robust mechanisms for regulating

speech and promoting truthfulness, including communal standards for testimony, scholarly certification systems for reliable narrators of hadith, and social opprobrium for known liars. While direct transplantation of these historical practices is neither possible nor desirable, their underlying principles remain relevant: communities bear responsibility for cultivating cultures that reward truthfulness and penalize deception, establish mechanisms for vetting information and sources, and maintain social networks that prioritize accuracy over sensationalism ([Rianto, 2019](#)). Muslim digital communities could pioneer such norms by developing community-driven fact-checking initiatives, creating educational resources on media literacy from Islamic perspectives, and establishing accountability systems where community members gently correct misinformation shared by peers ([Saleh et al., 2022](#)).

The pragmatic dimension of qaulan sadidan recognizes that effectively combating misinformation requires strategic communication that can compete with false narratives in the digital attention economy. Simply stating facts often proves insufficient to dislodge false beliefs, particularly when those beliefs are emotionally or ideologically invested. Research on effective debunking shows that successful correction of misinformation requires: providing alternative explanations that fill the gap left by discredited false claims, using compelling narratives and vivid examples rather than abstract statistics, timing interventions to reach audiences before false beliefs become entrenched, and tailoring messages to specific audiences' values and concerns. These pragmatic insights align with qaulan sadidan's emphasis on speech that is not merely true but also *balighan* (effective/impactful), suggesting that ethical truth-promotion requires sophisticated communication strategies rather than naive faith that facts speak for themselves.

Institutional and systemic dimensions of misinformation extend beyond individual or communal capacity to address, requiring engagement with platform governance, regulatory frameworks, and educational systems. The finding that just 0.25% of social media users create 73-78% of misinformation content suggests that targeted interventions addressing these 'superspreaders' could significantly reduce overall misinformation prevalence ([Grinberg et al., 2019](#)). From a qaulan sadidan perspective, platforms bear moral responsibility for the communicative environments they create and must implement policies that promote truthful speech while restricting deceptive content ([Couldry, 2010](#)). This includes more aggressive enforcement against coordinated inauthentic behavior, reduction of algorithmic amplification of divisive content, and transparent labeling of disputed claims and low-credibility sources ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)).

Educational interventions informed by qaulan sadidan principles must address not merely technical skills for evaluating information but also deeper questions of epistemic virtue, ethical discernment, and communicative responsibility. Current media literacy programs often focus narrowly on fact-checking techniques and source evaluation, neglecting the motivational and characterological dimensions essential for sustained commitment to truth ([Rianto, 2019](#)). A qaulan sadidan-informed approach would integrate: epistemic education that develops critical thinking and verification skills, ethical formation that cultivates disposition toward truthfulness and concern for justice, and practical training in effective communication that balances accuracy with strategic framing. Such comprehensive education could begin in religious institutions and community programs before extending to public school curricula and higher education, building intellectual infrastructure for more truthful communication ecosystems.

The challenge of correcting entrenched misinformation highlights tensions between qaulan sadidan's commitment to truth and its recognition of communication pragmatics. Research consistently shows that direct contradiction of false beliefs can backfire through psychological reactance, strengthening rather than weakening adherence to misinformation—the so-called 'backfire effect' ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). This presents a dilemma: truthful correction is obligatory, yet ineffective or counterproductive approaches fail to achieve qaulan sadidan's purpose of guiding people toward truth and beneficial action. Resolution requires sophisticated understanding of persuasion psychology, strategic communication timing, and relationship-based influence, recognizing that effective truth-promotion often requires long-term trust-building rather than immediate confrontation ([McIntyre, 2018](#)).

Cross-cultural and interfaith dimensions of combating misinformation present additional complexity requiring careful navigation. Muslim communities experience particular challenges with misinformation, including Islamophobic falsehoods about Islamic teachings and practices, intra-Muslim sectarian propaganda, and extremist content that weaponizes Islamic terminology for violent purposes ([El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009](#)). Qaulan sadidan principles must be applied both to correct external misrepresentations and to police internal false narratives, while avoiding descent into apologetics that denies legitimate criticism or sectarian recrimination that weaponizes truth claims ([Ali & Fahmy, 2013](#)). This delicate balance requires combining unwavering commitment to truth with charitable interpretation of others' perspectives, intellectual humility about the limits of

one's knowledge, and strategic judgment about when direct confrontation versus patient dialogue proves most effective.

The long-term project of building more truthful communication ecosystems requires sustained commitment extending beyond reactive responses to individual instances of misinformation. Just as traditional Islamic civilization developed elaborate intellectual infrastructure supporting truthful communication—from hadith sciences that evaluated narrator reliability to legal systems that regulated false testimony—contemporary Muslims must invest in institutional capacity for promoting *qaulan sadidan* in digital environments. This might include establishing Islamic media watchdog organizations that monitor and correct misinformation, creating accreditation systems for trustworthy online Islamic content, developing technology platforms designed around *qaulan sadidan* principles rather than engagement maximization, and building scholarly networks that can rapidly respond to emerging false narratives with authoritative corrections ([Saleh et al., 2022](#)). Such infrastructure development requires resources, coordination, and long-term vision, but offers more sustainable solutions than ad hoc individual efforts.

Reconstructing Trust and Civil Discourse: Qaulan Sadidan in Polarized Societies

The erosion of institutional trust and the intensification of political polarization constitute perhaps the most profound dimensions of the post-truth crisis, with implications extending far beyond discrete instances of misinformation to threaten the very foundations of democratic governance and social cohesion. The precipitous decline in public trust toward media, government, and other institutions reflects not merely exposure to false information but deeper alienation rooted in perceived betrayal, systemic injustice, and cultural conflict. Only 30% of Americans now trust mainstream media, and similar declines appear across democratic societies, creating space for demagogues and conspiracy theorists to exploit legitimate grievances for destructive purposes. *Qaulan sadidan* offers resources for addressing this crisis by reframing truthfulness not as abstract technical accuracy but as relational practice embedded in networks of trust, mutual respect, and collective pursuit of justice.

The connection between *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and *qaulan sadidan* in Surah al-Ahzab 33:70 illuminates the spiritual and relational foundations essential for trustworthy communication. *Taqwa* involves profound awareness of divine presence and accountability, transforming communication from strategic performance into authentic expression of truth-

oriented character ([Qutb, 2003](#)). This theological grounding suggests that sustainable trust requires not merely institutional reforms or procedural safeguards but cultivation of virtuous dispositions among communicators—politicians, journalists, religious leaders, and everyday citizens—who internalize responsibility for truthfulness as spiritual and ethical obligation rather than mere pragmatic consideration ([Nasr, 2006](#)). When speakers consistently demonstrate commitment to truth regardless of personal cost or strategic disadvantage, they gradually rebuild social capital and institutional credibility eroded by decades of manipulation, spin, and betrayal ([McIntyre, 2018](#)).

Addressing polarization requires understanding its roots in identity politics, tribal psychology, and the human need for meaning and belonging that political and ideological movements exploit ([Katz, 2025](#)). Research on political polarization shows that partisan attachments increasingly resemble religious or ethnic identities, with political opponents viewed not merely as wrong but as threatening and immoral ([Mason, 2018](#)). In such environments, factual information that challenges group narratives often triggers defensive reactions rather than belief revision, as accepting inconvenient truths feels like betrayal of one's community ([Kahan, 2013](#)). The qaulan sadidan framework addresses this dynamic by insisting that truthfulness ultimately serves rather than threatens authentic community, as shared commitment to truth provides firmer foundation for solidarity than does collective delusion. Islamic tradition's emphasis on ummah (community) balanced by individual accountability before God models how communal belonging need not require intellectual conformity or denial of truth.

The ethical dimension of qaulan sadidan proves particularly crucial for navigating polarized discourse, where technically accurate information is often weaponized to advance partisan agendas rather than promote understanding. The practice of selectively citing facts that support one's predetermined conclusions while ignoring contradictory evidence, though epistemically dishonest, has become standard in contemporary political communication ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). Qaulan sadidan's requirement of righteous intention challenges this instrumentalization of truth, demanding that communication serve justice and human welfare rather than mere factional advantage. In practical terms, this means acknowledging evidence that complicates preferred narratives, presenting opposing viewpoints fairly rather than caricaturing them, and resisting temptation to demonize opponents even when their positions merit strong criticism.

The pragmatic dimension addresses the difficult question of how to communicate across partisan divides when shared epistemological

foundations have eroded and appeals to neutral expertise carry little weight with suspicious audiences. Research on effective cross-partisan communication highlights the importance of: starting from shared values rather than disputed facts, acknowledging legitimate grievances underlying political positions one opposes, using trusted messengers from within polarized communities rather than outside authorities, and emphasizing complexity and nuance rather than simplistic moralizing. These strategic considerations align with qaulan sadidan's emphasis on speech that not only speaks truth but does so in ways that can be heard and accepted by the intended audience. Effective de-polarization requires patient relationship-building and strategic communication rather than mere reiteration of facts that alienated audiences have learned to dismiss.

Religious communities, including Muslim organizations and institutions, bear particular responsibility and possess unique capacity for modeling trustworthy communication and fostering civil discourse. Religious authority derives partially from perceived moral integrity and commitment to transcendent truth rather than partisan agenda, positioning religious leaders to serve as trusted bridges across political divides. However, this potential remains unrealized when religious communities themselves succumb to polarization, with mosques and Islamic organizations becoming extensions of partisan political coalitions ([Ali & Fahmy, 2013](#)). A renewed commitment to qaulan sadidan would require Muslim communities to maintain political engagement and advocacy while resisting complete alignment with any partisan faction, preserving religious authority's independence and credibility by demonstrating willingness to criticize allies and acknowledge valid points from opponents.

The challenge of maintaining truth commitment amid intense political conflict tests the sustainability of qaulan sadidan principles under pressure. Historical and contemporary examples demonstrate how revolutionary movements, nationalist mobilization, and warfare create powerful incentives for propagandistic communication that subordinates truth to strategic imperatives ([McIntyre, 2018](#)). Islamic history itself includes episodes where truthfulness yielded to political expediency, yet also provides counter-examples of scholars who maintained intellectual integrity despite persecution and exile ([Nasr, 2006](#)). The qaulan sadidan framework's theological grounding proves essential here, as commitment to truth ultimately rests on conviction that divine accountability transcends earthly consequences and that compromising truthfulness for strategic advantage constitutes betrayal of ultimate purpose ([Qutb, 2003](#)). This theological

conviction enables principled resistance to demands for propagandistic solidarity that characterize polarized politics.

Institutional reforms supporting civil discourse and trust-building must complement individual ethical commitments, creating structural incentives for truthful communication and penalties for deception. The qaulan sadidan framework suggests several institutional priorities: establishing independent oversight of political and media institutions with authority to investigate and sanction deliberate misinformation, creating protected spaces for good-faith dialogue across political divides insulated from social media pile-ons and partisan attacks, reforming media business models that privilege engagement over accuracy, and investing in educational initiatives that develop capacities for critical thinking, charitable interpretation, and constructive disagreement ([Rianto, 2019](#)). Muslim organizations could pioneer such institutional innovations, demonstrating how faith commitments can ground institutional practices supporting truthful and civil public discourse ([Saleh et al., 2022](#)).

Platform Governance and Technological Solutions: Designing Digital Ecosystems for Qaulan Sadidan

The architecture of digital platforms fundamentally shapes the communicative environment within which contemporary truth struggles unfold, with design choices about algorithms, content moderation, and user interfaces either facilitating or hindering ethical communication. Current social media platforms optimize primarily for user engagement and advertising revenue, creating perverse incentives that reward sensationalism, outrage, and divisiveness while penalizing nuanced truth-telling that generates less viral spread ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)). This business model conflict means that even well-intentioned individual users struggle to practice qaulan sadidan within digital ecosystems structurally biased against it ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). Addressing this systemic dimension requires reimagining platform governance and technological design according to principles that prioritize truthfulness, ethical discourse, and human flourishing over engagement maximization—an ambitious but essential project for which qaulan sadidan can provide ethical guidance ([Couldry, 2010](#)).

The epistemological dimension of qaulan sadidan suggests several priorities for platform design and governance. First, platforms should implement more robust verification and fact-checking systems, leveraging both automated technologies and human expertise to identify and label false or misleading content before it achieves viral spread ([Grinberg et al., 2019](#)).

Second, algorithmic recommendation systems should be redesigned to privilege content from credible sources over engagement metrics, even when this reduces short-term user engagement. Third, platforms should provide greater transparency about information sources, making it easier for users to assess credibility and identify potential biases or conflicts of interest ([Rianto, 2019](#)). Fourth, search and discovery features should be redesigned to surface diverse perspectives rather than reinforcing existing beliefs through personalization algorithms that create echo chambers ([Howard et al., 2018](#)). These technical interventions cannot guarantee truthfulness but can create environments more hospitable to it.

The ethical dimension of qaulan sadidan challenges platforms to take responsibility for the communicative cultures their designs cultivate and the harms their systems enable. The position that platforms serve merely as neutral intermediaries, bearing no accountability for content they host and amplify, becomes increasingly untenable as research documents their role in enabling genocide, terrorism, and systematic disinformation campaigns ([McIntyre, 2018](#)). From a qaulan sadidan perspective, platforms exercise communicative power and must therefore accept corresponding ethical responsibilities for ensuring their systems promote truthful, constructive discourse rather than deception and hatred. This requires more aggressive content moderation that removes not only illegal content but also material that, while technically legal, violates principles of truthful and ethical communication. The practical challenge lies in implementing such moderation without censoring legitimate disagreement or empowering bad-faith actors to weaponize content policies against opponents.

Alternative platform models demonstrate the possibility of social media designed around different values than engagement maximization. Platforms prioritizing chronological feeds over algorithmic curation, implementing stricter verification requirements, creating higher barriers to viral spread, or adopting nonprofit governance structures offer promising alternatives to dominant models ([Lewandowsky et al., 2017](#)). Muslim communities could pioneer faith-based platforms explicitly designed around Islamic communication ethics, including qaulan sadidan principles, providing safe spaces for intra-Muslim discourse while modeling ethical social media for broader society ([Saleh et al., 2022](#)). Such platforms might incorporate features like: pre-publication verification requirements for news content, built-in contextual information about contested claims, design elements that encourage reflection before sharing, and community governance systems empowering users to shape platform norms ([Rianto, 2019](#)).

The pragmatic dimension of qaulan sadidan recognizes that platform reforms must balance ethical ideals with practical realities of technology, business sustainability, and user behavior. Completely eliminating false information or ensuring perfect adherence to communication ethics remains impossible given the scale of digital communication and the sophistication of bad actors ([Vosoughi et al., 2018](#)). More realistic aims include: significantly reducing the viral spread of misinformation through friction-adding interventions, making it easier for users to identify and avoid low-credibility sources, creating strong incentives for truthful content creation through platform rewards and recognition, and building communities with robust norms for ethical communication that organically police member behavior ([McIntyre, 2018](#)). Such incremental improvements, while falling short of utopian aspirations, could meaningfully improve digital discourse without requiring either authoritarian control or technological perfectionism.

Regulatory frameworks governing digital platforms must balance multiple competing values including free expression, innovation, privacy, and public safety while avoiding both excessive centralization of power and anarchic environments where powerful actors exploit communicative infrastructure for destructive purposes. The qaulan sadidan framework suggests that regulation should focus less on content categorization (the impossible task of distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable speech) and more on system design and institutional accountability ([Couldry, 2010](#)). Regulations might require platforms to: conduct and publish regular audits of algorithmic bias and misinformation spread, implement effective appeals processes for content moderation decisions, provide researchers access to platform data for independent analysis, and demonstrate reasonable efforts to reduce misinformation and harmful content while preserving legitimate speech. Such structural regulations could improve platform accountability without requiring government officials to make individual content judgments.

The development of artificial intelligence and automated content generation introduces new challenges requiring proactive governance informed by qaulan sadidan principles. AI-generated text, images, and videos already blur lines between authentic and synthetic content, with deepfakes and large language models enabling sophisticated deception at unprecedented scale ([Chesney & Citron, 2019](#)). Qaulan sadidan's emphasis on truthfulness extends to transparency about content origins: communications should honestly represent whether they originate from human or machine sources, and AI-generated content should be clearly labeled as such. Platform policies should require disclosure of AI use in content creation, prohibit deployment of AI for generating misleading content, and develop technical standards for

authenticating human-created content ([Grinberg et al., 2019](#)). These governance innovations become urgent as AI capabilities advance and synthetic content becomes increasingly realistic and widespread.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive examination of qaulan sadidan as a framework for ethical communication in the post-truth era has revealed both the profound relevance of classical Islamic principles to contemporary challenges and the necessity of creative application that remains faithful to foundational texts while engaging with novel contexts. The research demonstrates that qaulan sadidan operates on three integrated dimensions epistemological (correspondence to reality and verification), ethical (righteous intention and moral responsibility), and pragmatic (effective communication and constructive impact) that together constitute a holistic approach to truthful speech transcending reductionist conceptions focused solely on factual accuracy. These limitations suggest several promising directions for future research. Empirical studies examining the implementation of qaulan sadidan-based interventions in Muslim communities, educational institutions, and digital platforms would provide crucial evidence regarding practical effectiveness and contextual adaptations required for successful application. Comparative research exploring convergences and divergences between qaulan sadidan and ethical communication frameworks from other traditions could identify universal principles while respecting cultural specificities, contributing to global efforts to combat misinformation and restore trust in public discourse.

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