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NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON HUMAN RELATIONS: AN ANALYSIS FROM SURAH LUQMAN

Tajudeen Yusuf¹

Abstract: Communication is a fundamental aspect of human relations and interactions, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal elements. While much emphasis is placed on verbal communication, nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures often carry significant weight in conveying messages. The study of nonverbal communication has garnered attention across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. However, the exploration of nonverbal communication through the lens of religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, remains relatively underexplored. This paper seeks to fill this gap by examining the teachings of Surah Luqman, a chapter in the Qur'an that offers profound wisdom on ethical conduct and human relationships. By integrating Islamic exegesis with psychological theories and contemporary research on nonverbal communication, this study aims to provide a holistic understanding of the role of body language and other nonverbal cues in fostering positive human relations. The analysis will focus on how nonverbal communication, as implied in the verses, influences human relations and the ethical principles that govern such interactions. The results of the study show that, in contemporary times, the relevance of these principles remains strong, as they provide a framework for addressing modern communication challenges. By adhering to the Islamic guidelines of honesty, respect, and empathy in communication, individuals can cultivate positive interpersonal relations that contribute to personal and communal well-being.

Keywords: Nonverbal Communication; Effects on Human Relations; Qur'an; Surah Luqman; Interpersonal Relations.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a multifaceted process that involves both verbal and nonverbal elements. While words convey explicit content, nonverbal communication often carries the emotional undertones and implicit messages that can either strengthen or weaken relationships. Nonverbal communication encompasses a range of behaviours, including facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, and tone of voice.¹ It plays a critical role in conveying emotions, intentions, and social cues, often influencing interpersonal dynamics more profoundly than verbal communication.

The impact of the divine communication principles is evident in the historical development of Islamic societies, where scholars and leaders have emphasized the importance of ethical communication in building cohesive and progressive communities. For example, nonverbal communication in Islam is closely tied to the concept of "adab," which refers to proper manners and etiquette. Adab encompasses both verbal and nonverbal aspects of behaviour, guiding Muslims to act with grace and respect in all interactions. For example, the act of greeting others with a smile and a warm handshake is encouraged, as it reflects kindness and a willingness to engage positively with others.² Such nonverbal gestures are simple yet powerful ways to strengthen bonds between individuals and communities. Furthermore, the Islamic emphasis on nonverbal communication extends to the way Muslims interact in communal settings. The act of standing shoulder to shoulder in prayer (Salah) symbolizes unity and equality among believers, serving as a nonverbal reinforcement of the communal bond.³ This physical proximity during prayer is a profound example of how nonverbal communication can foster a sense of solidarity and collective identity.

The works of classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun illustrate the significance of communication in maintaining social harmony and fostering intellectual growth within the Islamic world. In Islamic tradition, the Qur'an offers

¹ Judee K. Burgoon, Laura K. Guerrero, and Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2016).

² Muhammad ibn Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Al-Sunan* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1999), book 27, hadith 2495.

³ Muhammad ibn Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Darussalam, n.d.), book 10, hadith 686.

comprehensive guidance on human conduct, including the principles of communication and interaction. Surah Luqman, specifically, is a chapter that imparts wisdom on ethical living and moral behaviour, with several verses addressing the subtleties of nonverbal communication. Luqman, a figure of wisdom in Islamic tradition, advises his son on various aspects of life, including how to carry oneself with humility, avoid arrogance, and maintain a moderate and respectful demeanour. These teachings underscore the importance of nonverbal communication in building and sustaining respectful and compassionate relationships. Islamic teachings also advocate for the use of nonverbal communication in resolving conflicts and maintaining harmony. The principle of "sabr" (patience) is often manifested through nonverbal means, such as remaining calm and composed in the face of provocation. By controlling one's nonverbal reactions, such as refraining from aggressive gestures or facial expressions, Muslims are encouraged to de-escalate conflicts and promote peace.¹

This paper seeks to explore the impact of nonverbal communication on human relations by analysing the advice of Luqman to his son as recorded in Surah Luqman. By examining these teachings through the lens of psychological theories and contemporary research, this study aims to provide insights into the role of nonverbal cues in fostering ethical and harmonious relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nonverbal communication has been a subject of interest across various academic disciplines, including psychology, communication studies, and sociology. Research indicates that nonverbal communication often carries more weight in conveying meaning than verbal communication. Mehrabian's (1971) widely cited work suggests that only 7% of a message is conveyed through words, while 38% is conveyed through tone of voice, and 55% through body language. This highlights the importance of nonverbal cues in communication and their potential impact on interpersonal relations.

¹ AlQur'an, 3:134.

Research has consistently shown that nonverbal cues, such as actions and behaviour, have a more significant impact on communication than verbal expressions.¹ In fact, studies have found that when verbal and nonverbal messages conflict, recipients tend to rely more heavily on nonverbal cues to interpret the intended message.² This phenomenon is often summarized by the phrase "actions speak louder than words," highlighting the importance of behavioural expressions over verbal declarations.³ Indeed, hurtful actions can have a profound impact on individuals, leading to lasting emotional pain and damage to relationships.⁴

In fact, the hurt caused by actions can be more severe and long-lasting than hurt caused by words alone.⁵ This is because actions are often perceived as a more authentic representation of a person's true feelings and intentions.⁶ Furthermore, the emotional impact of hurtful actions can be exacerbated by the perceived intentionality and controllability of the behaviour.⁷ By recognizing the primacy of nonverbal communication, individuals can take steps to mitigate their impact, be more effectively convey their intended message and foster more empathetic and compassionate relationships.

In the context of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an and Hadith (sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad) provide guidance on both verbal and nonverbal communication.

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- ¹ Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1971).
 - ² Michael Argyle, *Bodily Communication* (London: Methuen, 1975).
 - ³ Daniel Katz, "The Functional Approach to the Study of Attitudes," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1960): 163-204.
 - ⁴ Anita L. Vangelisti, "Making Sense of Hurtful Interactions in Close Relationships," in *Attribution, Communication Behavior, and Close Relationships*, ed. Valerie Manusov and Jon H. Harvey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38-58.
 - ⁵ Mark R. Leary, Christine Springer, and Lura Negel, "The Causes, Consequences, and Cures of Hurt Feelings," in *Aversive Interpersonal Behaviors*, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (New York: Plenum Press, 1998), 99-118.
 - ⁶ Nico H. Frijda, "The Laws of Emotion," *American Psychologist* 43, no. 5 (1988): 349-58.
 - ⁷ Valerie S. Folkes, "Consumer Reactions to Product Failure: An Attributional Approach," *Journal of Consumer Research* 10, no. 4 (1984): 398-409.

Scholars have noted that the Qur'an places significant emphasis on the manner in which one communicates, not just the content of the communication.¹ Surah Luqman, in particular, is often cited for its emphasis on ethical conduct and the importance of humility and moderation in behaviour, both of which are closely related to nonverbal communication. Scholars like Al-Ghazali² and Al-Faruqi³ have explored the ethical dimensions of communication, including nonverbal aspects. However, there is limited scholarly work that directly ties the principles of nonverbal communication to specific verses of the Qur'an. This study aims to bridge this gap by analysing the wisdom imparted in Surah Luqman.

Alastair Pennycook⁴ examines the importance of paralanguage (kinesics, proxemics, and para-verbal features) in communication. Gestures, facial expressions, inter-factional synchrony, eye contact, use of space, touching, aspects of voice modification, and silence are shown to play a crucial role in human interaction and to be highly culture-specific. The implications of this broad paradigm of communication are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on content analysis of selected verses from Surah Luqman. The verses will be examined in the original Arabic text, followed by their translation and interpretation. The analysis will draw upon classical and contemporary *tafsir* (exegesis) to understand the implicit nonverbal cues and their impact on human relations. This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the teachings of Surah Luqman related to nonverbal communication. The analysis involves a close reading of the relevant verses from Surah Luqman, with a focus on identifying key themes related to nonverbal cues and their impact on human

¹ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya Ullum al-Din)* (Cairo: Dar al-Taqwa, 2004).

² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn [The Revival of the Religious Sciences]* (Cairo: Dār al-Taqwā, 2004).

³ Ismail Raji al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan* (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986).

⁴ Alastair Pennycook, "Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Paralanguage, Communication, and Education," *TESOL Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (June 1985): 259–282.

relations. The study also draws on classical and contemporary *tafsir* (exegesis) to provide a deeper understanding of the verses in their historical and cultural context. In addition to the analysis of Surah Luqman, the study incorporates insights from psychological theories on nonverbal communication and existing scholarly literature on the subject. By integrating these perspectives, the study aims to present a comprehensive analysis of the role of nonverbal communication in human relations from both an Islamic and psychological standpoint.

ISLAM AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Islam, as conveyed through the Qur'an and the Hadith, emphasizes the importance of communication rooted in truthfulness, respect, and compassion. The Qur'an, for instance, advocates for the use of "kind words" and "the best speech" in interactions, highlighting the importance of maintaining dignity and respect in communication.¹ This principle is further reinforced by the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, where he emphasized the significance of speaking good or remaining silent, thus establishing a clear guideline for ethical communication. The divine guidance in Islam extends beyond mere verbal communication, encompassing nonverbal cues, intentions, and the overall manner in which messages are conveyed. According to Islamic teachings, the intention behind communication is as important as the words themselves, as it reflects the purity of one's heart and intentions.² This alignment of internal intentions with external communication fosters trust and sincerity in interpersonal relations, leading to more positive and meaningful interactions.

Moreover, Islam encourages the resolution of conflicts through peaceful and constructive dialogue. The concept of "shura" (consultation) is central to Islamic governance and interpersonal relations, where individuals are encouraged to engage in open and honest discussions to reach consensus and resolve differences.³ This approach not only strengthens interpersonal relations but also promotes a culture of mutual respect and understanding within the community. The impact of these divine

¹ AlQur'an, 16:125.

² Muhammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Darussalam, n.d.), book 1, hadith 1.

³ AlQur'an, 42:38.

communication principles is evident in the historical development of Islamic societies, where scholars and leaders have emphasized the importance of ethical communication in building cohesive and progressive communities. For example, the works of classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun illustrate the significance of communication in maintaining social harmony and fostering intellectual growth within the Islamic world.

In contemporary times, the relevance of these principles remains strong, as they provide a framework for addressing modern communication challenges. By adhering to the Islamic guidelines of honesty, respect, and empathy in communication, individuals can cultivate positive interpersonal relations that contribute to personal and communal well-being.

ANALYSIS

The teachings of Luqman, as recorded in Surah Luqman, provide a rich source of guidance on the role of nonverbal communication in maintaining ethical and respectful relationships. Luqman's advice to his son covers various aspects of nonverbal communication, including body language, tone of voice, and overall demeanour, offering timeless wisdom that aligns with contemporary understanding of effective communication.

Luqman's Wisdom and Communication

Surah Luqman begins with a description of Luqman's wisdom, a gift from Allah.¹ This wisdom includes the ability to communicate effectively, both verbally and nonverbally. Luqman's advice to his son, as detailed in the subsequent verses, exemplifies the importance of respectful and mindful communication, which includes nonverbal elements such as tone, posture, and eye contact.

¹ AlQur'an, 31:12.

Humility in Nonverbal Communication

One of the key teachings in Surah Luqman is the importance of humility in nonverbal communication. Luqman advises his son:

“And do not turn your cheek [in contempt] toward people, and do not walk through the earth exultantly. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful”¹

This verse addresses the nonverbal behaviours associated with arrogance, such as turning one’s cheek in contempt and walking with an air of self-importance. These behaviours are outward manifestations of an internal state of arrogance, which is condemned in Islam. The verse highlights the importance of maintaining humility in one’s demeanour, as arrogance can lead to social discord and alienation.

Classical Islamic scholars have interpreted this verse as a call to humility and moderation in behavior. Ibn Kathir² explains that turning one’s cheek in contempt is a sign of arrogance and disdain for others, which is contrary to the ethical teachings of Islam. Al-Qurtubi³ adds that walking with an exultant gait reflects a sense of superiority over others, which is discouraged in Islam. These interpretations align with contemporary psychological research, which suggests that nonverbal cues such as body posture and facial expressions can significantly impact how others perceive us and can influence the quality of our relationships.⁴ The act of walking with an air of majesty or exultance is associated with a sense of superiority and self-importance, which the Qur'an warns against. This behavior is not just a physical act but a manifestation of one's inner state, reflecting pride and a lack of humility. In communication and behavioral studies, such nonverbal cues are often linked to negative social outcomes, as they can create barriers in relationships and convey disrespect or disdain for others.⁵

¹ AlQur'an, 31:18.

² Ismā'il ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr [Commentary on the Qur'ān]* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003).

³ Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jamī' li Ahkam al-Qur'an [The Compendium of Legal Rulings in the Qur'an]* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2003).

⁴ Judee K. Burgoon, Laura K. Guerrero, and Kory Floyd, *Nonverbal Communication* (7th ed.; Boston, MA: Pearson, 2016).

⁵ Ibid.

Linguistically, "walking majestically" can denote a controlled and deliberate stride, typically associated with power or authority. However, when interpreted through the ethical teachings of Islam, this phrase becomes a cautionary example of how one's external behavior can reflect inner arrogance. The Qur'an promotes humility, advising believers to avoid any form of nonverbal communication that could be construed as arrogant or boastful.

Moderation in Nonverbal Communication

Another important teaching in Surah Luqman is the principle of moderation in nonverbal communication. Luqman advises his son:

*"And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice; indeed, the most disagreeable of sounds is the voice of donkeys"*¹

This verse emphasizes the importance of moderation in both physical movement and vocal tone. The advice to be moderate in one's pace suggests that one should avoid extremes in behaviour, whether it be walking too quickly or too slowly, as both can convey negative messages. Similarly, lowering one's voice indicates the importance of controlling one's tone and volume, as speaking too loudly can be perceived as aggressive or disrespectful.

In Islamic teachings, moderation (*wasatiyyah*) is a key principle that applies to all aspects of life, including communication. Al-Qurtubi² notes that moderation in walking and speaking reflects a balanced and composed character, which is highly valued in Islam. This principle is also supported by contemporary psychological research, which suggests that moderate and controlled nonverbal behaviour is associated with greater emotional intelligence and social competence.³

¹ AlQur'an, 31:19.

² Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* [The Compendium of Legal Rulings in the Qur'an] (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2003).

³ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

DISCUSSION

Islamic teachings consider nonverbal communication to be an integral part of ethical conduct. The Qur'an and Hadith provide guidance on how Muslims should carry themselves in interactions, emphasizing humility, respect, and consideration for others. For instance, the Qur'an advises believers to "*lower their gaze and guard their modesty*"¹ which is a directive on nonverbal behaviour aimed at promoting respect and dignity in interactions, particularly between men and women.

Moreover, the Prophet Muhammad's example is often cited in Islamic literature as a model for nonverbal communication. His demeanor, characterized by gentleness, patience, and empathy, served as a nonverbal cue that influenced the behavior of those around him. For example, it is reported that the Prophet would often smile, even in challenging situations, which helped to diffuse tension and foster a positive atmosphere.² This illustrates how nonverbal cues such as facial expressions can play a crucial role in enhancing interpersonal relations.

The teachings of Luqman in Surah Luqman provide valuable insights into the role of nonverbal communication in fostering ethical and respectful relationships. By discouraging arrogance and promoting humility and moderation in nonverbal conduct, these teachings align with both Islamic ethical principles and contemporary psychological theories on effective communication.

One of the key themes that emerges from this analysis is the importance of self-awareness in nonverbal communication. Luqman's advice to his son emphasizes the need to be mindful of one's demeanour and the potential impact of nonverbal cues on others. This is consistent with the concept of emotional intelligence, which involves the ability to recognize and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others. Emotional intelligence is closely linked to nonverbal communication, as it often involves the interpretation and regulation of nonverbal cues.³

¹ AlQur'an, 24:30-31.

² Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *Sahīh Muslim* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000), book 32, hadith 6229.

³ Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

Another important theme is the role of nonverbal communication in conveying respect and empathy. The emphasis on humility and moderation in nonverbal behaviour reflects an understanding of the social and emotional aspects of human interaction. By maintaining a respectful and considerate demeanour, individuals can foster positive relationships and contribute to social harmony. This is particularly important in Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of maintaining good relations with others and avoiding behaviours that can lead to conflict or discord.

CONCLUSION

Nonverbal communication, as highlighted in Surah Luqman, plays a crucial role in shaping ethical and respectful human relations. The teachings of Luqman provide timeless guidance on the importance of body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and overall demeanour in maintaining social harmony and building compassionate relationships. This study underscores the relevance of Islamic teachings in contemporary discussions on communication and interpersonal relations, demonstrating how ancient wisdom can inform modern understandings of nonverbal communication. The integration of Islamic exegesis with psychological theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of nonverbal communication on human relations. By exploring the teachings of Surah Luqman, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on the role of communication in fostering ethical and harmonious relationships. Future research could further explore the intersections between Islamic teachings and contemporary communication theories, offering new insights into the ways in which religious and cultural values influence nonverbal communication practices.

From a linguistic perspective, nonverbal communication can be seen as a "silent language" that conveys emotions, attitudes, and social cues without the use of words. This aligns with the teachings in Surah Luqman, where Luqman advises his son to maintain humility and moderation in his nonverbal behavior. The Qur'anic verses emphasize the importance of body language, suggesting that one's physical demeanor should reflect inner humility and respect for others. The advice in Surah Luqman to lower one's voice and walk with moderation is a reflection of this concept, as these

behaviors demonstrate self-control and empathy, key components of emotional intelligence.

In summary, the teachings of Surah Luqman resonate with both linguistic and communication theories, highlighting the critical role of nonverbal communication in fostering ethical and harmonious relationships. The Qur'an's emphasis on humility and moderation in nonverbal behavior provides timeless guidance that aligns with contemporary understandings of effective communication and emotional intelligence.

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