

The Prophet Muhammad's Responses to Opponents and Supporters: A Quantitative Analysis of Qur'anic Prophet–People Conversation Patterns

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ABSTRACT:

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This study aims to examine the Qur'anic verses that record the dialogues between the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the people. After identifying the dialogical methods employed by the Prophet's audience, it investigates how the Prophet responded to both opponents and supporters according to their methods. To achieve accurate results and provide a systematic analysis of the verses, association rules (a data-mining method) have been applied. The findings show that the Holy Qur'an contains 153 verses devoted to the dialogues of the Prophet with the people, which can be divided into 72 separate conversations. The main focus of this study is on the verses in which the people initiate the dialogue and the Prophet provides the response. By categorizing the Prophet's interlocutors into opponents and supporters, and by identifying the dialogical methods used by both sides, ten dialogical methods were recognized: emotional, argumentative, interrogative, exhortative, persuasive, propagative, denunciatory, assertive, derisive, and threatening. The analysis reveals that when the opponents initiate dialogue in an interrogative manner, the Prophet's response is propagative; when their

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method is denunciatory, the Prophet responds with propagative and argumentative approaches; when their method is assertive, the Prophet responds in a persuasive manner; and when their method is derisive, his response is threatening. By contrast, the dialogue method of the supporters is predominantly interrogative, to which the Prophet responds in an exhortative manner.

KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad, Qur'anic Dialogical Patterns, Prophetic Communication, Qur'an Mining, Association Rule Analysis.

1. Introduction

The exemplary role of the divine prophets and the doctrine of their infallibility prompt one to contemplate their conduct, namely, their words, actions, and thoughts, in order to discern principles and salient points conducive to human spiritual growth and flourishing. It can be argued that the dialogues of the prophets with their people are among the most effective and impactful forms of conversation, for nothing has penetrated the depths of the human soul as profoundly as religion. Indeed, the prophets' dialogues with their communities represent some of the most successful means for embedding faith in God and guiding human thought and perception.

Among the prophets, only five were entrusted with a divine law (*al-sharī'ah*), which renders the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) unique and exceptional. While each law-bearing prophet was commissioned to guide a specific people, Prophet was sent to address all of humankind for all times. His mission is thus so comprehensive that there is no longer any need for another prophet to be sent after him. In line with the narrative, "*We, the company of prophets, have been commanded to speak to people according to the measure of their intellects*" (al-Kulaynī 1986, 1:23; al-Ḥarrānī 1983, 1:37), it may be said that prophets dealt with their audiences in accordance with their intellectual capacities.

This consideration motivated the present research: by examining the Qur'anic verses in which the Prophet engaged in dialogue with people and by identifying the dialogical methods employed, the study seeks to address the question of how the Prophet responded to the utterances of his interlocutors. In order to assess this properly, the audience must first be divided into two groups, opponents and supporters. Next, the dialogical methods used by the Prophet and by his audience must be identified. Finally, through the application of association rules (a data-mining method), the relationship between the Prophet's dialogical methods and those of his interlocutors, both opponents and supporters, can be systematically

evaluated.

What is of particular importance is whether the Prophet's method of dialogue exemplified arguing in a manner that is best (*mujādalāh bil-aḥsan*), as in “*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and dispute with them in a manner that is best*” (Q. 16:125) and “*Repel ill [conduct] with that which is the best*” (Q. 23:96), or reciprocity (*muqābalah bil-mithl*), as in “*The requital of evil is an evil like it*” (Q. 42:40) and “*For those who have committed misdeeds, the requital of a misdeed shall be its like*” (Q. 10:27). This indicates that whether the people were supporters or opponents, and whether they addressed the Prophet in a favorable or unfavorable manner, he either responded with mercy and forgiveness or reacted in kind.

The scope of this study is limited to those Qur'anic verses in which a dialogue occurs between the Prophet and the people, whether opponents or supporters, where the initiators of the dialogue are the interlocutors themselves, in order that the Prophet's reactions may be assessed. Verses in which the Prophet initiates the dialogue (six dialogues comprising nineteen verses) are excluded from the scope of this research. For the purpose of this study, dialogue is defined as the exchange of speech between a speaker and an interlocutor. Such a dialogue may be realized within a single verse or across multiple verses.

2. Literature Review

Numerous books and articles have been authored on the biography and life of the Prophet. However, the focus of the present study is specifically on the dialogues of the Prophet in the Qur'an and, more precisely, on his dialogical method with his audience, a subject that has not been explicitly addressed in the existing literature. By way of reviewing the relevant research in this field, the following studies may be introduced: “*Manners of Conversation from Perspective of Qur'an and the Prophet*” (Azizi and Mahdavi Farid 2015); “*The culture of negotiation and dialogue in Sira Prophet of Islam (PBUH)*” (Janahmadi and Ahmadi 2022); “*Consequences of the peace-loving trait of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) based on His dominant behavioral chain in Qur'an*” (Fariani et al. 2023).

It should also be noted that works such as “*Dialogue in the Qur'an*” (Mir 1992) are found among English sources, but these focus generally on dialogue in the Qur'an and do not bear direct relevance to the present study. While the aforementioned works are valuable, there remains a need for a specialized analysis of the Prophet's dialogues in order to determine his dialogical methods in addressing different types of audiences.

It is also noteworthy that the application of computational data mining and association rules in the analysis of Qur'anic data has been exemplified in academic research, such as the Master's thesis "*Extracting divine laws using association rules in Qur'anic verses*" (Seraji 2022) and the article "*Emotion Recognition from Qur'anic Text Using Advanced RoBERTa Deep Learning Network*" (Karami et al. 2023).

3. Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the dialogues, it is necessary to identify specific dialogical methods within the verses. Accordingly, based on a review of various articles and books, six methods, emotional, argumentative, interrogative, exhortative, persuasive, and propagative, were drawn from the article "*Dialogue in the Qur'an*" (Kariminia 2004). However, further study of the verses revealed that four additional modes, denunciatory, assertive, derisive, and threatening, may also be posited. Thus, by identifying these four dialogical methods during the analysis of the verses and adding them to the six previously defined methods, the content of the verses can be more comprehensively covered (Table 1). The six dialogical methods defined by Kariminia (2004) are as follows:

1. Emotional Dialogue: In certain verses, the use of human senses or the arousal of the audience's emotions and feelings can be observed.
2. Argumentative Dialogue: Verses that contain reasoning and rational arguments.
3. Interrogative Dialogue: Some Qur'anic dialogues appear in the form of questions or requests for legal and educational clarification, with the aim of providing explanatory responses to questions posed to the Prophet.
4. Exhortative Dialogue: Dialogue that is effective because it is devoid of violence, humiliation of the interlocutor, or provocation of stubbornness. The Qur'an calls upon the Prophet to engage with others through goodly exhortation and in an exhortative manner.
5. Persuasive Dialogue: In some verses, in order to invite reflection and convince the audience, questions are posed that cannot be easily rejected, or explanations are given with the aim of persuading the interlocutor.
6. Propagative Dialogue: Verses that emphasize the propagation of religion and the communication of the divine message.

The four dialogical modes identified during the present study are defined as follows:

7. **Denunciatory Dialogue:** Verses in which negation or rejection occurs, whether rejection of the other's statement or judgment, denial of existential truths, or denial of God, and so forth.
8. **Assertive Dialogue:** Verses in which a statement is simply expressed, independent of any advice, exhortation, threat, encouragement, derision, or propagation. Assertion here may be considered equivalent to affirmation or declaration.
9. **Derisive Dialogue:** Verses containing humiliating words or allusions; any form of mockery, ridicule, reproach, belittlement, or insult falls under this category.
10. **Threatening Dialogue:** Verses that employ threatening words or allusions for the purpose of warning and instilling fear of dreadful events, such as depictions of eschatological punishments or threats of death.

It should be noted that a single dialogue may encompass multiple dialogical methods simultaneously. Furthermore, this study refers exclusively to those conversations in which one party is the Prophet himself and the other is a human interlocutor. Instances in which the interlocutor is God, the angels, or animals are excluded from the scope of this research.

Table 1. Dialogical Methods Framework

No.	Dialogical Method	Brief Definition
1	Emotional	Use of senses or emotions to move the audience
2	Argumentative	Verses containing reasoning and rational arguments
3	Interrogative	Dialogue in the form of questions seeking clarification
4	Exhortative	Dialogue free of violence or humiliation, using goodly exhortation
5	Persuasive	Aimed at reflection and convincing the interlocutor
6	Propagative	Focused on propagation of religion and delivering the message
7	Denunciatory	Negation or rejection of statements, truths, or God
8	Assertive	Simple assertion without advice, exhortation, or threat
9	Derisive	Mockery, ridicule, reproach, belittlement, or insult
10	Threatening	Threatening words or warnings of punishment or death

4. Research Methodology

In this study, the speech rules of the Prophet were extracted using the association rules technique. Association rules are a data-mining operation aimed at discovering relationships between features within a dataset. This type of analysis is also known as market basket analysis. Essentially, association rules indicate conditions that occur repeatedly together in a

dataset. The extracted rules describe the presence of certain features on the basis of others. Association rules are expressed in the form of if-then statements and are defined with two measures: support and confidence.

- Support: indicates the percentage or number of transaction sets in which a given feature set appears.
- Confidence: indicates the degree of dependency of one feature on another and is calculated according to the following formula, for example:

$$\text{Confidence}(X \rightarrow Y) = \frac{\text{Support}(X \cup Y)}{\text{Support}(X)}$$

This index measures the degree of dependency between two feature sets (X and Y) and serves as a criterion for evaluating the strength of a rule. Typically, a rule is selected when it demonstrates a high confidence value. Strong rules are those that simultaneously exhibit both support and confidence values above the threshold (Ghazanfari et al. 2008, 157–160).

To apply the association rules method, the first step was to compile a dataset of the Qur'anic verses containing the Prophet-people dialogues. The second step was to identify the types of dialogical methods and the roles of speaker and interlocutor in the speech exchanges recorded in these verses. After implementing these specifications in the selected verses and tabulating the results in Excel, a dataset was constructed that served as the basis for extracting association rules from the Qur'an.

Since the principal requirement of this study, namely, the dataset of verses, already exist in the article “*Extracting the Dialogue Patterns of Prophets in the Qur'an*” (Ashtiani et al. 2024),¹ it was decided to make use of the datasets and features provided therein. In that article, a wide range of features influencing dialogue in the verses were identified, among them the dialogical methods employed by both speaker and interlocutor. This dataset covers all ten dialogical methods examined in the present research.

5. The Dialogical Rules of the Prophet

An examination of the dataset of dialogue verses reveals that the Qur'an contains a total of 153 verses related to the dialogues of the Prophet with the people, which can be distinguished into 72 separate conversations. In six conversations (19 verses), the Prophet is the initiator, while in 66 conversations (134 verses) the Prophet responds to the utterances of his interlocutors (Ashtiani et al. 2024). Accordingly, the present study analyzes

1- The dataset is available at: <https://quran.sbu.ac.ir/peykare>

these 66 dialogues.

The purpose of applying association rules here is to determine, in cases where the interlocutors initiate the dialogue, what dialogical methods they employed and how the Prophet responded in turn. For a more precise analysis of the results, the Prophet's interlocutors have been divided into two categories: opponents and supporters. An examination of the dialogue verses shows that the category of opponents includes Jews, the People of the Book, Quraysh, Christians, Jewish leaders, Jews and Christians collectively, disbelievers, hypocrites, defectors, polytheists, and the ignorant. The category of supporters, on the other hand, includes Muslims, believers, the Prophet's wife, and certain groups of people. The analysis of the data indicates that 46 dialogues were conducted between the Prophet and opponents, and 20 dialogues between the Prophet and supporters.

5.1. Opponents as the First Party

The analysis of the results shows that the dialogical methods employed by the opponents were predominantly interrogative, denunciatory, assertive, and derisive. The details and the Prophet's corresponding responses are presented as follows (Table 2):

Rule 1: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative.

- Support (first party= opponents, second party = Prophet, method of opponents = interrogative): 18 cases
- Support (method = propagative): 8 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, method of opponents = interrogative → method of Prophet = propagative): 44%

$$Confidence = \frac{8}{18} \approx 44\%$$

Rule 2: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a denunciatory method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative and argumentative.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = denunciatory): 18 cases
- Support (method = propagative and argumentative): 7 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = denunciatory → Prophet's method = propagative and

argumentative): 38%

$$Confidence = \frac{7}{18} \approx 38\%$$

Rule 3: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an assertive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is persuasive.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = assertive): 11 cases
- Support (method = persuasive): 4 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = assertive → Prophet's method = persuasive): 36%

$$Confidence = \frac{4}{11} \approx 36\%$$

Rule 4: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a derisive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is threatening.

- Support (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = derisive): 10 cases
- Support (method = threatening): 6 cases
- Confidence (first party = opponents, second party = Prophet, opponents' method = derisive → Prophet's method = threatening): 60%

$$Confidence = \frac{6}{10} \approx 60\%$$

Among these opponents, the methods emotional, exhortative, and threatening were not used at all, and only a single dialogue was found for each of the methods argumentative, persuasive, and propagative. For this reason, they were not considered suitable for deriving association rules.

Table 2. Dialogical Methods of the Opponents and the Responses of the Prophet

Opponents' Method	Prophet's Response	Frequency	Confidence (%)
Interrogative	Propagative	8	44%
Denunciatory	Propagative–Argumentative	7	38%
Assertive	Persuasive	4	36%
Derisive	Threatening	6	60%

5.2. Supporters as the First Party

If the first party is the supporters and the second party is the Prophet, and

the supporters employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is exhortative (Table 3).

- Support (first party = supporters, second party = Prophet, supporters' method = interrogative): 18 cases
- Support (method = exhortative): 7 cases
- Confidence (first party = supporters, second party = Prophet, supporters' method = interrogative → Prophet's method = exhortative): 38%

$$\text{Confidence} = \frac{7}{18} \approx 38\%$$

Among these supporters, the methods emotional, exhortative, propagative, denunciatory, derisive, and threatening were not used at all. Furthermore, only a single dialogue was identified for each of the methods argumentative, persuasive, and assertive, and therefore they were not suitable for deriving association rules.

Table 3. Dialogical Methods of the Supporters and the Responses of the Prophet

Supporters' Method	Prophet's Response	Frequency	Confidence (%)
Interrogative	Exhortative	7	38%

6. Analysis of Rules

In the previous step, the components influencing the extraction of rules were identified and the acceptable rules were introduced. At this stage, examples are presented for each case, followed by an analysis of the rules. It is important to note that multiple dialogical methods may appear within a single dialogue. Therefore, while the examples provided correspond to the rules introduced, they may also contain additional dialogical methods.

Rule 1: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative with a probability of 44%. For instance, in the verse Q. 2:142, a dialogue takes place between the foolish ones and the Prophet:

The foolish among the people will say, "What has turned them away from the qiblah they were following?" Say, "To Allah belong the east and the west. He guides whomever He wishes to a straight path."

The Prophet, employing a propagative method, responds by affirming God's absolute ownership, which is one of the fundamental elements of monotheism. Thus, he emphasizes that both the east and the west belong to

God, and that He disposes of them according to His wisdom and will (al-Ṭabrisī 1993, 1: 413).¹

Rule 2: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a denunciatory method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is propagative and argumentative with a probability of 38%. For example, in Q. 46:7–10, a dialogue takes place between the disbelievers and the Prophet. At the beginning of their speech, the disbelievers reject the Qur'an as the miracle of the Prophet, declaring it to be sorcery from him, and they accuse him of falsely attributing it to God. The Prophet responds by combining propagative and argumentative methods to demonstrate that the accusation of fabrication is untenable and that the Qur'an is in fact a divine miracle from the Almighty:

When Our manifest signs are recited to them, the faithless say of the truth when it comes to them: "This is plain magic." Do they say, "He has fabricated it?" Say, "Should I have fabricated it, you would not avail me anything against Allah. He best knows what you gossip concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you, and He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful." Say, "I am not a novelty among the apostles, nor do I know what will be done with me, or with you. I just follow whatever is revealed to me, and I am just a manifest warner." Say, "Tell me, if it is from Allah and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and believed [in it], while you are disdainful [of it]?" Indeed Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot (Q. 46:7-10).

According to Tabataba'i, two forms of argumentation can be identified in the Prophet's words: first, *"If I have fabricated it, you do not hold any power to protect me from Allah"*; and second, *"Sufficient is He as a witness between me and you."* The Prophet clarifies that if he had fabricated the Qur'an and falsely attributed it to God, then God Himself would punish him severely, and no one would be able to prevent it. Hence, it is impossible that he should knowingly expose himself to God's certain punishment by inventing lies against Him. The second argument indicates that God's own testimony in the Qur'an, that it is His word and not a fabrication, is sufficient proof of the Prophet's truthfulness (Tabataba'i 1996, 18: 288).²

Rule 3: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ an assertive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is persuasive with a probability of 36%. For example, in Q. 3:183, a dialogue occurs between the Jewish leaders and the Prophet.

1- Further examples for this rule include Q. 6:37 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet), Q. 36:78–83 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet), and Q. 29:50 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

2- Further examples for this rule include Q. 17:90–100 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet) and Q. 34:34–37, 39 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

Their speech is assertive in nature:

[To] those who say, "Allah has pledged us not to believe in any apostle unless he brings us an offering consumed by fire," say, "Apostles before me certainly brought you manifest signs and what you speak of. Then why did you kill them, should you be truthful?" (Q. 3:183)

The Prophet responds with a persuasive argument to remove their pretext. Here, persuasion is used as a form of reasoning less forceful than full logical argumentation, but sufficient to expose the inconsistency in their claim.¹

Rule 4: If the first party is the opponents and the second party is the Prophet, and the opponents employ a derisive method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is threatening with a probability of 60%. For example, Q. 9:61 recounts a dialogue between the hypocrites and the Prophet.

Among them are those who torment the Prophet, and say, "He is an ear." Say, "An ear that is good for you. He has faith in Allah and trusts the faithful, and is a mercy for those of you who have faith." As for those who torment the Apostle of Allah, there is a painful punishment for them (Q. 9:61).

The hypocrites, in order to belittle and reproach him, said: "*He is all ears,*" portraying him as overly credulous and easily influenced. The Prophet redefines this trait positively. Yet, he follows with a threat of painful punishment.²

Rule 5: If the first party is the supporters and the second party is the Prophet, and the supporters employ an interrogative method, then the Prophet's dialogical method is exhortative with a probability of 38%. For example, Q. 2:220 presents a dialogue between a group of people and the Prophet.³ They ask about the treatment of orphans. The Prophet responds with exhortative guidance:

And they ask you concerning the orphans. Say, "It is better to set right their affairs, and if you intermingle with them, they are of course your brothers: Allah knows the one who causes corruption from the one who brings about reform, and had Allah wished He would have put you to hardship." Indeed Allah is all-mighty, all-wise (Q. 2:220).

1- Further examples for this rule include Q. 5:17 (dialogue between Christians and the Prophet), Q. 2:140 (dialogue between the People of the Book and the Prophet), Q. 10:15–16 (dialogue between polytheists and the Prophet).

2- Further examples for this rule include Q. 34:43, 46–50 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet), Q. 52:30–33 (dialogue between disbelievers and the Prophet).

3- Further examples for this rule include Q. 2:189 (dialogue between people and the Prophet), and Q. 3:165 (dialogue between Muslims and the Prophet).

The comparison of the identified rules between the two categories of interlocutors, opponents and supporters, reveals an important distinction. When both categories employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded differently according to their stance. With opponents, he responded in a propagative manner, emphasizing the fundamentals of religion such as divine unity, resurrection, and prophet hood. With supporters, however, he responded in an exhortative manner, offering practical and spiritual guidance for their growth within their existing faith commitment. This highlights the decisive role that the status of the interlocutor, whether opponent or supporter, played in shaping the Prophet's dialogical approach.

7. Conclusion

Among the verses of the Qur'an, 153 verses are devoted to dialogues between the people and the Prophet. In 134 of these verses, the people are the initiators of speech. Based on the speaker, interlocutor, and subject matter, these verses can be divided into 66 distinct dialogues.

In the Qur'anic dialogues with the Prophet, the opponents include Jews, the People of the Book, Quraysh, Christians, Jewish leaders, Jews and Christians collectively, disbelievers, hypocrites, dissenters, polytheists, and the "foolish ones." The supporters, by contrast, include Muslims, believers, the Prophet's wife, and groups of people.

Five dialogical rules regarding the Prophet's conversational methods with people can be identified: four pertaining to opponents and one pertaining to supporters. The rules are as follows:

- When the opponents employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded propagatively.
- When the opponents employed the denunciatory method, the Prophet responded propagatively and argumentatively.
- When the opponents employed the assertive method, the Prophet responded persuasively.
- When the opponents employed the derisive method, the Prophet responded threateningly.
- When the supporters employed the interrogative method, the Prophet responded exhortatively.

A comparison of the Prophet's responses to both opponents and supporters when they employed the same dialogical method reveals a significant difference: when opponents used the interrogative method, the

Prophet responded propagatively, but when supporters used the same method, he responded exhortatively. In the propagative method, the Prophet focused on explaining fundamental religious principles such as divine unity, resurrection, and the necessity of prophethood. In the exhortative method, however, his aim was to provide intellectual and practical recommendations to nurture the supporters within their pre-existing faith commitments.

The Prophet's dialogical approach appears to be a combination of responding in the best manner and reciprocal response. For instance, when opponents resorted to ridicule, he responded in kind through a threatening method. Conversely, when opponents denied his mission, he countered with what is best, using propagative and argumentative methods in an attempt to alter their perspective and draw them toward the discourse of truth. In sum, the Prophet tailored his dialogical method according to the circumstances and exigencies of the dialogue.

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