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Negotiating Quranic Values in Muslim Friendship Practices: A Living Quran Analysis

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Abstract

Friendship constitutes a crucial dimension of Muslim social life that significantly influences character formation, moral orientation, and religious identity. In the context of increasingly complex social interactions, the selection of friends has become a critical issue, as social relationships shape individual values, behaviors, and ethical commitments. The Quran provides normative guidance for establishing relationships with individuals who demonstrate faith, moral integrity, and a commitment to promoting virtue. This article aims to analyze how Quranic values concerning friendship are understood, negotiated, and practiced within Muslim social life through the perspective of Living Quran studies. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design within the Living Quran framework, this study examines Quranic verses, Prophetic traditions, and relevant scholarly literature. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings associated with Muslim friendship practices. The findings reveal four major themes: prioritizing friends who embody faith and piety, avoiding relationships that encourage immoral behavior, fostering friendships based on mutual advice and moral support, and cultivating companionship grounded in sincerity for the sake of God. These findings demonstrate that Quranic values continue to be actively negotiated and actualized in contemporary Muslim social practices, contributing to character formation, moral resilience, and the construction of religious identity.

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social beings who cannot exist apart from interactions and relationships with others. One of the forms of social relationships most closely tied to an individual's life is friendship (Faisal, 2026; Rahmi et al., 2026). From a social psychology perspective, peers serve as agents of socialization that play a role in shaping a person's identity, values, behavior, and character (Kusumawati et al., 2024). During adolescence and early adulthood, the influence of peer groups often becomes

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a dominant factor in determining an individual's moral orientation and decision-making. Therefore, the quality of friendships has significant implications for an individual's personality development and religiosity (Hartanti, 2023).

Advances in information technology and social media have expanded the scope of social interaction while simultaneously increasing the complexity of friendships (Fajriah & Ningsih, 2024). Interactions that take place in both physical and digital spaces have various effects that can be either constructive or destructive. Positive peer groups can foster empathy, social responsibility, and moral commitment, whereas negative social environments have the potential to lead to deviant behavior, identity crises, and the erosion of moral values. Research indicates that peer groups exert a strong influence on the development of adolescents' morality, religiosity, and social behavior. Therefore, the choice of friends has become an increasingly important issue in efforts to build moral resilience and character among the Muslim generation amid the dynamics of modern life.

From an Islamic perspective, friendship is understood not only as a social relationship based on emotional needs and worldly interests, but also as a means of character development, preserving faith, and strengthening religious identity (Nurjanah et al., 2025; Sadewa et al., 2025). The Quran places special emphasis on the importance of choosing a social environment that supports obedience to Allah SWT. As Allah states in the Quran:

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِيْنَ يَدْعُوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدٰوةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيْدُوْنَ وَجْهَهٗ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنٰكَ عَنْهُمْۚ تُرِيْدُ زِيْنَةَ الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَاۚ وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ اَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهٗ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوٰىهُ وَكَانَ اَمْرُهٗ فُرُطًا

Meaning: *And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect.* (QS. Al-Kahfi: 28)

According to Shihab, (2018), this verse indicates that a pious social environment is a crucial factor in maintaining one's spiritual consistency. The command to remain among those who constantly remember Allah implies that the quality of one's social circle influences the quality of one's faith and character. Thus, the formation of a Muslim's personality occurs not only through individual worship but also through social interactions built upon the values of piety.

This principle is reinforced by the words of Allah

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ وَكُوْنُوْا مَعَ الصّٰدِقِيْنَ

Meaning: *O you who have believed, fear Allah and be with those who are true.* (QS. At-Taubah: 119)

According to Kathīr, (2000), the phrase *ma'a al-shādiqīn* is a command to associate with those who are truthful, pious, and of integrity, because closeness to them will strengthen one's commitment to the truth and keep one away from moral deviation. This verse indicates that the choice of friends is part of the ongoing process of forming one's religious identity.

The Quran also explains the consequences of social relationships that are not built on the foundation of piety. Allah, the Exalted, says:

اَلْاَخِلَّآءُ يَوْمَىِٕذٍۢ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ اِلَّا الْمُتَّقِيْنَ

Meaning: *Close friends, that Day, will be enemies to each other, except for the righteous* (QS. Az-Zukhruf: 67)

According to Ath-Ṭabarī, (2007), this verse explains that social relationships based solely on worldly interests will end in regret and hostility, whereas friendships built on the foundation of faith and piety will retain their value into the afterlife. This interpretation indicates that the Quran views friendship as a space for the

internalization of values that simultaneously connects the social, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Mashuro et al., 2025).

This Quranic foundation is reinforced by a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him:

الرَّجُلُ عَلَى دِينِ خَلِيلِهِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَحَدُكُمْ مَنْ يُخَالِلُ

Meaning: "*A person follows the religion of his close friend, so let each of you be mindful of who his close friend is.*" (Narrated by Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi).

This hadith indicates that a person's character, mindset, and religious orientation are influenced by his circle of friends. The same message is emphasized in the hadith parable of the perfume seller and the blacksmith, which illustrates that good friends bring benefits, while bad friends can cause various moral and spiritual harms. Thus, the choice of friends in Islam is not merely a social matter but also part of the effort to maintain the quality of one's faith and moral character.

The theme of friendship in Islam has been the focus of various previous studies. Afifah et al., (2025) found that the quality of friendships and religious commitment contribute to the formation of Islamic character among college students. Furthermore, (Husaini et al., 2025) demonstrated that peer groups have a significant influence on adolescents' behavior and religiosity from an Islamic perspective.

In a study of hadith, Febriyani et al., (2014) explained that friendship is one of the main factors influencing an individual's character development and social behavior. Meanwhile, Lukman & Syam, (2026) explain that the ethics of friendship in the Quran are not only oriented toward social benefits but also serve to protect individuals from disbelief, sin, and various forms of moral deviance.

Similar findings were reported by Zaini et al., (2026), who showed that ethical conduct toward friends in Islam includes honesty, mutual aid, guarding one's speech, respecting differences, and social responsibility as the foundation of harmonious social relationships. On the other hand, Ramidi, (2025) found that the religious identity of Muslim adolescents is constructed through a process of negotiating meaning that takes place in daily interactions with their peer groups. Research findings on the religiosity of Indonesian Muslim adolescents also indicate that friendships make a significant contribution to the development of an individual's religious commitment. Furthermore, Nurhasanah & Noviani, (2024) explains that the concept of friendship in the Quran is not merely about social closeness but also reflects relationships built on the foundation of compassion, moral support, and a shared spiritual orientation.

Nevertheless, most previous research has focused on the influence of friendship on character, social ethics in Islam, thematic studies of hadith, and the analysis of exegesis of verses on friendship. These studies generally regard the Quran as a normative source that explains the ideal nature of social relationships. In reality, however, in the lives of contemporary Muslims, the Quranic values regarding friendship are not merely understood textually but also undergo processes of reception, interpretation, negotiation, and actualization in everyday social practice. This perspective is significant because it demonstrates how the sacred text is alive and functions within the social experience of Muslims.

Previous studies have mostly discussed friendship from the perspectives of normative theory, character education, social psychology, hadith studies, and the exegesis of verses on friendship. However, there remains a lack of studies that specifically analyze how the Quran's values regarding friendship are received, negotiated, and actualized in Muslim social practices through the living Quran perspective. Consequently, there is a gap between the Quran's normative teachings on the selection of friends and the reality of friendship practices that have developed in contemporary Muslim life.

The novelty of this article lies in its use of a phenomenological approach within the framework of the Living Quran to analyze the practice of choosing friends as a form of social reception of Quranic values. Unlike previous studies that have focused on normative textual analysis, the influence of friendships on character, or studies of exegesis and hadith, this research examines how Quranic values are understood, negotiated, and actualized in the practice of Muslim friendships. Thus, this article connects the dimensions of text, meaning, and social practice within a single integrative analytical framework.

Theoretically, this study enriches the development of living Quran scholarship by demonstrating that Quranic values remain alive and active in shaping the social practices of Muslim communities. Methodologically, this study expands the use of the phenomenological approach in living Quran studies to understand the relationship between text and religious social experience. Practically, the findings of this study can serve as a foundation for strengthening character education based on Quranic values, developing youth development programs, and supporting the efforts of families, educational institutions, and the community in building a supportive social environment that fosters character development, moral resilience, and Islamic identity in the modern era.

METHODS

This article employs a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how the Quranic values regarding friendship are understood, interpreted, and manifested in the social lives of Muslims. This study is situated within the framework of the living Quran, which views the Quran not only as a normative text but also as a living text that is brought to life through the reception, interpretation, and social practices of the Muslim community. From this perspective, the focus of the research lies not solely on the content of the Quranic text but also on how Quranic messages are present, negotiated, and reproduced in the social experiences of Muslim communities (Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026; Numan et al., 2025; Syamsuddin, 2013). To achieve this objective, the research was conducted through the stages of data collection, data classification, thematic analysis, phenomenological interpretation, and the presentation of findings within the framework of the living Quran.

Methods and Type

This study employs a qualitative approach of the phenomenological type within the framework of the living Quan. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore in depth the meanings, experiences, perceptions, and social constructions underlying a phenomenon. According to Creswell, (2014), qualitative research is used when the research objective is oriented toward understanding the meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding a social phenomenon. This approach is relevant to the focus of this study, which not only examines the Quran's teachings on friendship as a normative text but also seeks to understand how these values are lived out in the social lives of Muslims.

The research method employed was phenomenology, an approach aimed at uncovering the meaning of the lived experiences of individuals or groups regarding a specific phenomenon (Efendi et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2026; Moustakas, 2011; Widianti et al., 2026). Phenomenology is considered appropriate because the practice of choosing friends in Islam is not only related to a conceptual understanding of verses and hadiths but also involves religious experience, moral consciousness, and the process of meaning-making that takes place in daily life. Through this approach, it is possible to explain how Muslim individuals understand, feel, and implement Quranic values in building friendships.

The living Quran framework was used because this study seeks to explain the manifestations of Quranic values in social reality. Zaman, (2020) explains that Living

Quran studies focus on society's responses to and practices of the Quran in daily life. In line with this, Adel et al., (2025); Aziz, (2023); Engkizar et al., (2026) emphasize that the living Quran examines how the Quran lives on (as a living scripture) through the traditions, behaviors, culture, and social practices of Muslims. Therefore, this framework is considered the most appropriate for analyzing how the Quran's values regarding friendship are not only understood textually but also negotiated and manifested in the practice of choosing friends, which shapes the character, religious identity, and social relationships of Muslims.

Thus, the combination of qualitative, phenomenological, and living Quran approaches provides a strong methodological foundation for explaining the relationship between the Quranic text, the process of religious interpretation, and the social practices of Muslims. This approach allows the research to move from the normative dimension to the empirical dimension, thereby revealing how Quranic values are lived out and function in contemporary Muslim friendships.

Data Sources

The research data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data includes Quranic verses related to social relations and friendship, such as Surah Al-Kahfi 28, Surah At-Taubah 119, and Surah Az-Zukhruf 67, as well as hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that discuss the influence of friends and the importance of choosing a good social environment. Secondary data was obtained from classical and contemporary exegetical works, hadith commentaries, academic books, articles from reputable scientific journals, and various previous studies relevan.

Instruments

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher (human instrument). In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument responsible for identifying, selecting, organizing, interpreting, and making sense of the data in accordance with the research focus (Creswell, 2018; Engkizar et al., 2024; 2025). To support the research process, documentation sheets, data categorization matrices, and analytic memos were used as tools to group data, record findings, and develop interpretations throughout the analysis process.

Data Analysis Tools

This study employed thematic analysis, as developed by Braun & Clarke, (2013), as the data analysis tool. Thematic analysis was chosen because it is capable of systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns of meaning that emerge from the data. The use of thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify key themes that represent the reception and actualization of Quranic values in the practice of choosing friends to the themes of friendship, character development, and the living Quran.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted in six stages, as outlined by (Clarke & Braun, 2018). The first stage is data familiarization, which involves repeatedly reading and understanding all the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. The second stage is initial coding, which involves assigning codes to information relevant to the research focus. The third stage is identifying themes (searching for themes), which involves grouping codes with similar meanings into specific categories. The fourth stage is reviewing themes to ensure their alignment with the analyzed data. The fifth stage is defining and naming themes, while the sixth stage is reporting the analysis results.

Within the framework of the living Quran, the analytical process aims to uncover how Quranic verses on friendship are received, understood, negotiated, and realized in the social lives of Muslims. Thus, the analysis focuses not only on the normative content of religious texts but also on the relationships between texts,

interpretations, experiences, and social practices that have developed within Muslim societies.

Data Validity

Data validity is ensured through source triangulation by comparing information obtained from the Quran, hadith, exegetical works, hadith commentaries, scholarly journal articles, and relevant prior research. In addition, careful observation of the data and repeated examination of the interpretation results were conducted to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the findings. This process aims to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research, as proposed by (Setiyani et al., 2026), so that the research results possess strong academic validity and are scientifically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of Quranic verses reveals that friendship, from an Islamic perspective, is understood not only as a social relationship formed on the basis of emotional closeness, shared interests, or specific goals, but also as a relationship with moral and spiritual dimensions. Friendship is one of the social spaces where religious values are understood, interpreted, and put into practice in daily life. In this context, the Quran provides a normative foundation regarding the importance of choosing one's social circle, guarding oneself against negative influences, building mutually reinforcing relationships centered on goodness, and orienting social relationships toward servitude to Allah the Almighty. These values demonstrate that the quality of friendship is not only measured by the intensity of communication or the duration of the relationship, but also by its influence on the formation of a person's character, behavior, and moral orientation.

This finding can be understood through the living Quran perspective, which is a study of how the Quran is present, understood, internalized, and practiced in the lives of Muslim communities. In this approach, the Quran is not merely positioned as a sacred text whose meaning is studied through interpretation, but also as a source of values that interacts with the social experiences of Muslims (Santono et al., 2024). The Quran's values regarding friendship can manifest in a person's decisions when choosing close friends, setting boundaries in social interactions, offering advice to friends, maintaining healthy relationships, or ending relationships deemed harmful (Irawan & Alif, 2025). Thus, the practice of friendship serves as a concrete arena for observing the relationship between the Quran's normative teachings and the social reality of Muslims.

This perspective also suggests that applying the values of the Quran in friendships is not always a simple or uniform process. A Muslim may face situations where emotional closeness with a friend conflict with the need to uphold religious principles (Ginting et al., 2025). For example, someone might wish to maintain a relationship with a longtime friend but simultaneously realize that the dynamics of that relationship encourage behavior that contradicts Islamic values. In such circumstances, the individual must engage in moral deliberation to determine how the relationship can be maintained without compromising religious principles. It is this process of deliberation that can be interpreted as a form of value negotiation that is, the effort to apply the teachings of the Quran to concrete social situations through understanding, evaluation, and decision-making.

Based on a thematic analysis of the relevant Quranic principles, there are four main interrelated themes. First, prioritizing friends who are faithful and God-fearing as an effort to build a social environment that supports moral and spiritual growth. Second, avoiding social circles that lead to sin as a form of protection for one's integrity. Third, building relationships based on mutual exhortation toward goodness as an expression of moral responsibility among friends. Fourth, fostering friendships

grounded in sincerity for the sake of Allah as a spiritual orientation that frees social relationships from the dominance of pragmatic interests. These four themes are not strictly separate categories but rather form a unified system of Quranic friendship ethics: choosing a virtuous environment, maintaining moral boundaries, nurturing the quality of relationships, and aligning the orientation of friendship.

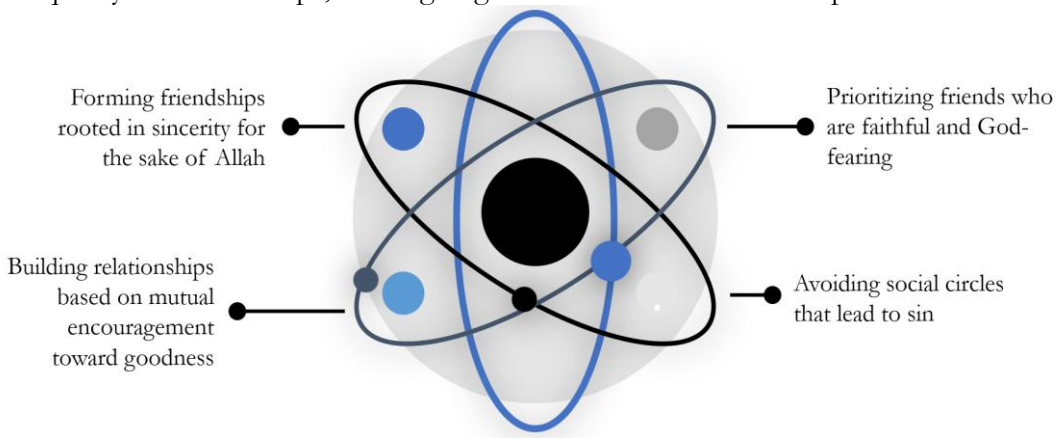


Fig 1. Quranic Values in Muslim Friendship Practices

First, prioritizing friends who are faithful and God-fearing. The first finding indicates that choosing friends who are faithful and God-fearing is one of the key principles of friendship ethics according to the Quran. This principle stems from the understanding that one's social environment plays a role in shaping a person's habits, mindset, moral orientation, and behavior (Romadona, 2021). Friendship does not take place in a neutral space, as repeated interactions can influence how individuals perceive things, set priorities, and make decisions. Therefore, choosing friends who are oriented toward goodness and piety can be understood as an effort to build a social environment that supports religious devotion.

A relevant foundation for explaining this principle is found in Surah al-Kahf [18]:28, which commands the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to be patient with those who pray to Allah in the morning and evening and seek His pleasure. This verse reads:

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِيْنَ يَدْعُوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدٰوةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيْدُوْنَ وَجْهَه وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنٰكَ عَنْهُمْۚ تُرِيْدُ زِيْنَةَ الْحَيٰوةِ الدُّنْيَاۚ وَلَا تُطِعْ مَنْ اَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَه عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوٰىهُ وَكَانَ اَمْرُه فُرُطًا

Meaning: *And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect.* (QS. Al-Kahfi: 28)

This verse provides a normative basis for the importance of maintaining closeness with those who make Allah's pleasure the guiding principle of their lives. The phrase *alladzīna yad'ūna rabbahum bil-ghadāti wal-'asyiyyi yurīdūna wajhah* describes people who continually direct their devotion toward Allah and seek His pleasure. In the context of friendship, these characteristics can serve as a basis for understanding the qualities of a good friend namely, a friend whose presence encourages an individual to remember their moral and spiritual responsibilities (Sinaulan et al., 2025). This verse also serves as a reminder not to neglect a virtuous social circle simply because one is drawn to the social status, wealth, popularity, or worldly allure possessed by others.

Nevertheless, QS. al-Kahf [18]: 28 does not explicitly mention the term choosing friends in the modern sense. This verse speaks of the command to remain with those who remember Allah and seek His pleasure. Its relevance to friendship lies in the principle of social closeness built on spiritual orientation, rather than solely

on considerations of status or worldly gain. This distinction is important so that the application of the verse does not go beyond its textual content. Thus, the use of this verse in this study constitutes an ethical elaboration of the Quran's message regarding a virtuous social environment.

A similar principle is emphasized in Surah al-Furqān [25]: 27–29, which describes a person's regret for following a close friend who led him away from Allah's warnings. The verses read:

وَيَوْمَ يَعَضُّ الظَّالِمُ عَلٰى يَدَيْهِ يَقُوْلُ يٰلَيْتَنِى اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُوْلِ سَبِيْلًا

يٰوَيْلَتٰى لَيْتَنِيْ لَمْ اَتَّخِذْ فُلَانًا خَلِيْلًا

لَقَدْ اَضَلَّنِيْ عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ اِذْ جَآءَنِيْۗ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطٰنُ لِلْاِنْسَانِ خَذُوْلًا

Meaning: *And the Day the wrongdoer will bite on his hands [in regret] he will say, "Oh, I wish I had taken with the Messenger a way. Oh, woe to me! I wish I had not taken that one as a friend. He led me away from the remembrance after it had come to me. And ever is Satan, to man, a deserter."* (QS. Al-Furqan: 27-29)

The word *khalilan* in verse 28 indicates a very close relationship. This depiction of regret underscores that social closeness can have moral consequences when the relationship becomes a means of leading someone away from the truth. The Quran not only highlights the influence of friends on behavior but also holds the individual accountable for their own choices (Hatlah et al., 2026). The person expressing regret in this verse realizes that their closeness to a particular friend has influenced their life's direction. However, that regret does not absolve them of personal responsibility for the decisions they made.

From the perspective of the living Quran, these two parts of the verse can serve as a foundation for understanding how Muslims ascribe religious significance to the process of choosing friends. The values of the Quran can be embodied in the practice of evaluating the character of potential close friends, being mindful of the influence of one's social circle, or maintaining close relationships with individuals committed to worship and moral conduct. However, the application of this principle should not be limited to similarities in formal identity or outward religious appearance. Someone who openly displays religious symbols is not necessarily always a role model in behavior, whereas an individual who still has shortcomings may demonstrate honesty, compassion, and a sincere desire to improve themselves (Elmontadzery et al., 2024).

Therefore, the author argues that prioritizing friends who are faithful and God-fearing should be understood as an effort to choose relationships that support moral growth, not as a justification for belittling or ostracizing others. God-fearingness in the context of friendship must be reflected through the quality of one's actions, such as honesty, responsibility, a willingness to admit mistakes, respect for others, and a drive to do good. This principle also requires humility, as one cannot judge the quality of another person's faith based solely on appearances or verbal claims.

Theoretically, this finding aligns with the perspective of moral socialization, which views social circles as one of the spaces where habits and value orientations are formed. In close-knit relationships, individuals can learn group norms through observation, imitation, social acceptance, and direct experience. This mechanism helps explain why social circles can reinforce positive habits such as reminding one another to pray or, conversely, normalize behavior that contradicts religious principles (Delima et al., 2026). However, the influence of the environment is not absolute. Individuals still possess the capacity to reflect, resist peer pressure, and determine their stance based on their own moral considerations.

Second, avoid social circles that lead to sinful behavior. The second finding indicates that avoiding social circles that lead to sinful behavior is an important part of efforts to maintain the consistency of Islamic values in the practice of friendship

(Al Ghefira et al., 2025). The Quran emphasizes the influence of the social environment because ongoing relationships can shape how a person perceives the boundaries between behavior that is permissible and behavior that contradicts religious teachings (Zayyadi & Unsiyyah, 2025). In the context of friendship, this issue relates not only to individual actions but also to the norms that develop within the group (Leswidyanti et al., 2025). A behavior that was initially considered inappropriate can become normalized when repeated among close friends. Conversely, positive behavior can become a habit if the social circle provides support and recognition for such actions.

One of the relevant Quranic foundations for explaining this principle is found in Surah al-Furqān [25]: 27–29, which was discussed in the first finding. These verses describe a person's regret for choosing a certain individual as a close friend, a choice that distanced him from Allah's warnings. While in the first finding these verses emphasized the importance of choosing friends who support goodness, in the second finding the same verses can be interpreted from the perspective of preventing negative influences in social relationships. These two perspectives complement one another: the selection of good friends must be accompanied by an awareness of the forms of social interaction that have the potential to undermine moral and religious integrity.

Another foundation is found in Surah al-An'ām [6]: 68, which teaches the attitude of withdrawing from gatherings when Allah's verses are mocked or denied, until the conversation shifts to another topic. The verse reads:

وَاِذَا رَاَيْتَ الَّذِيْنَ يَخُوْضُوْنَ فِيْٓ اٰيٰتِنَا فَاَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتّٰى يَخُوْضُوْا فِيْ حَدِيْثٍ غَيْرِهٖۗ وَاِمَّا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطٰنُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرٰى مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظّٰلِمِيْنَ

Meaning: *And when you see those who engage in [offensive] discourse concerning Our verses, then turn away from them until they enter into another conversation. And if Satan should cause you to forget, then do not remain after the reminder with the wrongdoing people.* (QS. Al-An'am: 68)

This verse indicates that a Muslim must be mindful of the limits of social engagement when a particular environment openly discusses matters that constitute an insult or abuse of Allah's teachings. The main message is not a prohibition against interacting with anyone who holds differing views, but rather a recommendation not to persistently engage in situations that involve violations of religious principles. Applying this verse in the context of friendship may involve having the courage to voice objections, redirecting inappropriate conversations, or leaving a particular situation if remaining in it would require one to condone behavior that contradicts one's beliefs.

In contemporary social life, this principle is relevant to various forms of peer pressure. An individual may feel compelled to conform to their friends' behavior to avoid being seen as different, to maintain emotional closeness, or to remain accepted within the group (Mardison, 2016). Such pressure can arise in both face-to-face interactions and digital spaces for example, when a group of friends routinely insults others, spreads harmful information, engages in bullying, or commits acts that violate moral boundaries. In such situations, the decision not to participate is both an act of personal responsibility and an effort to uphold moral integrity.

However, avoiding sin does not always have to be achieved by immediately severing ties. The author argues that there are several levels of response that can be considered depending on the circumstances. First, one can politely express objections when problematic behavior can still be corrected. Second, one can limit involvement in certain activities without having to end the entire social relationship. Third, if a relationship consistently encourages harmful actions or serious violations of moral principles, keeping one's distance may be a necessary step. This distinction is

important so that Quranic friendship ethics are not misunderstood as a demand to hastily sever ties whenever behavioral differences arise.

This principle must also be viewed within the framework of striking a balance between self-preservation and respect for human dignity. Avoiding sinful behavior does not mean that one is justified in humiliating, condemning, or considering oneself holier than others. A Muslim can still show concern for a friend who has erred while refusing to engage in that behavior (Damanik & Islamia, 2025). In other words, applying the values of the Quran requires the ability to distinguish between rejecting a certain behavior and humiliating the person who commits it. Rejection can be part of moral responsibility, whereas humiliation has the potential to damage social relationships and close off opportunities for improvement.

From the living Quran perspective, the second finding demonstrates that Quranic values can be actualized through the practice of self-control, setting boundaries in social interactions, and resisting peer pressure that contradicts religious principles. The internalization of Quranic verses is evident not only when a person reads or memorizes the sacred text but also when they make decisions in social situations involving moral dilemmas (Khoiriyah et al., 2025). In this sense, avoiding sin is a form of practical reception of the Quran because its normative messages serve as the foundation for concrete actions.

From an argumentative perspective, the author views moral strength in friendship as being determined not merely by a person's ability to avoid negative influences, but also by their ability to uphold principles without losing their sense of humanity. Friendship in accordance with Quranic values enables a person to say no to wrongful behavior, offer reasons politely, and keep the door open for mending relationships. Thus, the second finding addresses the research objective by explaining that the Quranic values of self-control and prudence in social interactions play a role in building individual moral resilience amid the dynamics of modern social relationships.

Third, building relationships based on mutual exhortation toward righteousness. The third finding indicates that, from the Quranic perspective, friendship cannot be established merely by choosing good friends and avoiding deviant behavior. Such relationships must also be cultivated through the practice of mutual exhortation toward righteousness. This principle positions friendship as a space for moral learning that allows each individual to receive support, correction, and reinforcement when facing life's challenges. In such relationships, friends serve not only as companions in daily activities but also as those who help their friends uphold the values they believe to be true.

The most relevant foundation for explaining this principle is found in QS. al-'Aṣr [103]: 1–3. This surah reads:

وَالْعَصْرِۙ

اِنَّ الْاِنْسَانَ لَفِيْ خُسْرٍۙ

اِلَّا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا وَعَمِلُوا الصّٰلِحٰتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ ەۙ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Meaning: *By time, Indeed, mankind is in loss, Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.* (QS. Al-'Asr: 1-3)

The Quran, Surah al-'Aṣr [103]: 3, explicitly mentions two principles that are very important for the ethics of friendship, namely *tawāṣaw bil-ḥaqq and tawāṣaw biṣ-ṣabr*. The first phrase means advising one another in truth, while the second phrase highlights the importance of advising one another in patience. The use of reciprocal verb forms emphasizes that moral responsibility does not rest solely on one party. Every individual may be in a position to offer advice when they observe a mistake, but must also be willing to accept advice when they themselves need correction.

In the context of friendship, the principle of mutual counsel can be realized through simple actions, such as reminding a friend to keep a promise, helping a friend weigh risky decisions, inviting them to worship, or offering support when someone is facing difficulties. These practices demonstrate that advice does not always have to be delivered in the form of a formal religious sermon. Advice can also be conveyed through everyday conversations, showing concern for a friend's well-being, a willingness to listen, and setting a good example through one's actions.

It is important to note that the Quran links advice to both truth and patience (Handayani & Jaya, 2024). This connection indicates that conveying the truth cannot be separated from the manner, timing, and attitude with which advice is given. A person may have good intentions, but advice delivered in a way that humiliates, belittles, or attacks a friend's self-respect can lead to conflict and hinder the acceptance of the message. Therefore, a friendship grounded in the values of the Quran requires the ability to communicate the truth wisely without compromising the firmness of one's principles.

The next foundation is found in Surah at-Taubah [9]: 71, which describes the reciprocal relationship between believing men and women as partners who help one another and fulfill their religious responsibilities. This verse reads:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ وَالْمُؤْمِنٰتُ بَعْضُهُمْ اَوْلِيَاۤءُ بَعْضٍۘ يَأْمُرُوْنَ بِالْمَعْرُوْفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيْمُوْنَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَيُؤْتُوْنَ الزَّكٰوةَ وَيُطِيْعُوْنَ اللّٰهَ وَرَسُوْلَهٗۗ اُولٰۤىِٕكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللّٰهُۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَزِيْزٌ حَكِيْمٌ

Meaning: *The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakah and obey Allah and His Messenger. Those - Allah will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.* (QS. At-Taubah: 71)

This verse explains that relationships among believers involve a dimension of social responsibility. The phrase *ba'ḍuhum awliyā'u ba'ḍ* indicates a relationship of mutual support and assistance, while the command to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil demonstrates that this support has a moral orientation. When considered in the context of friendship, a good relationship not only provides emotional comfort but also creates space for each party to develop into a more responsible individual (Sinaulan et al., 2025).

Although this verse speaks more broadly about relationships among believers, the principles it contains are relevant for analyzing friendship as a form of social relationship. Friendship can serve as a space for fulfilling such responsibilities because emotional closeness allows individuals to understand their friends' circumstances more deeply (Nisak & Nurdin, 2024). When a friend faces difficulties, a close friend can provide practical help. When someone makes a mistake, a close friend can offer gentle reminders. When someone loses motivation, a close friend can offer encouragement so that they do not abandon their responsibilities.

Within the framework of the living Quran, the application of the value of mutual admonition can be seen in the ways individuals translate the Quran's messages into their daily interactions. For example, a group of friends might agree to remind one another when it is time to pray, help each other with their studies, avoid spreading unverified information, or offer support to a friend facing family problems. These practices take different forms but stem from the same underlying principle: using social relationships as a means to foster goodness.

In the context of digital interactions, this principle can also be applied through responsible communication. Friends can remind one another not to spread insults, not to humiliate others through posts, and not to participate in cyberbullying on social media. Thus, mutual counsel is not limited to face-to-face interactions but can also take place through private messages, group chats, and interactions in digital spaces. However, its application still requires ethical consideration to ensure that

advice does not turn into excessive surveillance or an attempt to control others' personal lives.

Fourth, fostering friendships grounded in sincerity for the sake of Allah. The fourth finding indicates that sincerity for the sake of Allah is a spiritual dimension that provides a fundamental orientation for the practice of friendship in Islam. While the previous three findings addressed the selection of friends, self-restraint in social interactions, and the responsibility to offer mutual advice, the fourth finding explains the foundation that unites all three. Sincerity positions friendship not merely as a relationship maintained for the sake of personal gain, status, or emotional needs, but rather as a relationship directed toward the goodness and pleasure of Allah SWT.

In social life, friendships often form because of shared interests, educational backgrounds, occupations, experiences, or specific interests (Varlina et al., 2024). These factors are not inherently at odds with Islamic teachings. Friendships can begin with practical needs and develop into sincere relationships. Problems arise when personal interests become the sole basis of a relationship, so that attention, loyalty, and assistance are provided only as long as a person continues to offer benefits. From an Islamic ethical perspective, a spiritual orientation helps individuals transcend purely transactional relationships and cultivate a more consistent concern for the well-being of others.

A relevant foundation is found in Surah al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 10, which affirms brotherhood among believers and commands efforts to reconcile disputing parties. This verse reads:

ۚ اِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ اِخْوَةٌ فَاَصْلِحُوْا بَيْنَ اَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُوْنَ

Meaning: *The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy.* (QS. Al-Hujurat: 10)

This verse explicitly affirms the principle of brotherhood among believers. Although the term "brotherhood" is not entirely synonymous with individual friendship, the two are interconnected in terms of care, responsibility, and the maintenance of social relationships. The command to reconcile disputing parties indicates that relationships grounded in religious values should not function only during times of harmony. Rather, such relationships must also be nurtured through efforts to resolve conflicts and restore them to the principles of justice and goodness.

In the context of friendship, this verse provides a foundation for understanding that sincerity does not mean relationships must always proceed without differences. Conflicts can arise due to misunderstandings, differences of opinion, an imbalance of attention, or actions that hurt feelings. Sincerity is tested when a person must decide whether to sustain the relationship through effective communication, acknowledge mistakes, offer forgiveness, or set necessary boundaries. Thus, sincerity cannot be measured solely by expressions of affection but also by the willingness to treat friends fairly and responsibly (Muslimah et al., 2025).

This principle can also be linked to Surah al-Mā'idah [5]: 2, which commands cooperation in righteousness and piety and forbids cooperation in sin and hostility. The relevant portion of this verse reads:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا لَا تُحِلُّوْا شَعَاۤىِٕرَ اللّٰهِ وَلَا الشَّهْرَ الْحَرَامَ وَلَا الْهَدْيَ وَلَا الْقَلَاۤىِٕدَ وَلَآ اٰۤمِّيْنَ الْبَيْتَ الْحَرَامَ يَبْتَغُوْنَ فَضْلًا مِّنْ رَّبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَانًا ۗوَاِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَاصْطَادُوْا ۗوَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَاٰنُ قَوْمٍ اَنْ صَدُّوْكُمْ عَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ اَنْ تَعْتَدُوْا ۘوَتَعَاوَنُوْا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوٰى ۖوَلَا تَعَاوَنُوْا عَلَى الْاِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۚوَاتَّقُوا اللّٰهَ ۗاِنَّ اللّٰهَ شَدِيْدُ الْعِقَابِ

Meaning: *O you who have believed, do not violate the rites of Allah or [the sanctity of] the sacred month or [neglect the marking of] the sacrificial animals and garlanding [them] or [violate the safety of] those coming to the Sacred House seeking bounty from their Lord and [His] approval. But when you come out of ihram, then [you may] hunt. And do not let the hatred of a people for having obstructed you from al-Masjid al-Haram lead you to*

> *transgress. And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.* (QS. Al-Maidah: 2)

The Quran, Surah al-Mā'idah [5]: 2, shows that the quality of a relationship can be assessed through the goals and actions that result from that relationship. In friendship, mutual assistance is a positive behavior when directed toward virtue and piety. Conversely, loyalty to a friend cannot be used as a justification for aiding wrongful actions or protecting behavior that harms others. Thus, sincerity for the sake of Allah establishes goodness as the guiding principle of a relationship, while simultaneously limiting an understanding of loyalty that demands defense without considering whether an action is right or wrong.

The author argues that one of the key characteristics of a friendship grounded in sincerity is the willingness to seek the best for a friend without expecting a commensurate benefit in return. A person may offer help because a friend needs it, not because they expect an immediate return. They may pray for their friend's well-being, offer support when their friend faces failure, and continue to respect their friend's dignity even if the relationship does not always yield material benefits. Such behavior demonstrates that social relationships can hold spiritual value when carried out with good intentions and manifested through actions consistent with religious principles.

Nevertheless, sincerity does not mean that a friendship must be maintained under all circumstances without limit. If a relationship consistently involves manipulation, violence, exploitation, or harmful behavior, keeping one's distance can be a responsible decision. Wishing the best for a friend does not require one to sacrifice their safety, tolerate injustice, or continue to accept harmful treatment. In this context, sincerity must be understood in conjunction with the principles of justice, responsibility, and the protection of human dignity.

From the perspective of the living Quran, sincerity can be understood as an inner value expressed through social practices. While a person's intentions cannot always be directly observed, this orientation can be reflected in the consistency of behavior, a willingness to help selflessly, the ability to uphold trust, and the way conflicts are resolved. Nevertheless, researchers must be cautious not to conclude a person's sincerity based solely on observable actions. Phenomenological research is better suited to exploring how individuals understand their intentions, interpret friendships, and explain the religious reasons behind the decisions they make.

When it comes to the practice of friendship, the hadith indicates that the value of a relationship is determined not only by the duration of the friendship or the frequency of meetings, but also by its underlying moral and spiritual orientation. Friendship for the sake of Allah does not mean that one must always discuss religious matters, but rather that the relationship is directed toward goodness, maintained through honesty, and not inadvertently used as a means to commit acts contrary to religious teachings (Sarbini, 2020).

Thus, the fourth finding affirms that sincerity for the sake of Allah provides an orientation that unifies various aspects of the ethics of friendship. Sincerity fosters a sense of care that is not entirely dependent on personal gain, supports the fair resolution of conflicts, and establishes goodness as the foundation of loyalty. From the perspective of the Living Quran, this value comes to life when the teachings on brotherhood, piety, and cooperation in virtue are translated into tangible social behavior.

The four findings above demonstrate that the Quranic values regarding friendship form an interconnected ethical framework. Prioritizing friends who are faithful and God-fearing provides direction for the formation of a social environment. Avoiding associations that lead to sin serves as a means of preserving moral integrity. Exhorting one another toward righteousness transforms friendship

into a space for learning and shared responsibility. Meanwhile, sincerity for the sake of Allah provides the spiritual orientation that underlies actions and the maintenance of relationships. When read as a unified whole, these four themes reveal that Quranic friendship ethics are not only concerned with whom one chooses as a friend, but also with how the relationship is conducted, what values are upheld, and what moral goals are to be achieved.

These findings suggest that friendship can serve as a space for the formation of Muslim character. Character is not formed solely through an understanding of religious teachings, but also through habits consistently practiced within social relationships. Honesty, for example, can develop when friends cultivate the habit of speaking the truth and upholding trust. Responsibility can be strengthened through the habit of reminding one another and fulfilling commitments. Patience can grow when individuals learn to deal with differences of opinion without immediately severing ties. Meanwhile, compassion can develop when friendships provide space for acts of kindness without always expecting something in return.

These relationships can be explained through the perspective of social learning, which emphasizes the roles of observation, imitation, interaction, and social reinforcement in shaping behavior. Individuals learn norms not only through verbal explanations but also through shared experiences with those close to them. When honesty is valued within a group of friends, honest behavior has the potential to become a socially reinforced norm. Conversely, if lies or harmful actions continue to be tolerated, individuals may struggle to maintain moral standards that differ from the group's norms.

Thus, the primary impact that can be explained through this conceptual analysis is the provision of a framework for understanding friendship as a space for the actualization of Quranic values. This framework demonstrates that the quality of social relationships is related to the choice of environment, the ability to maintain moral boundaries, the practice of mutual admonition, and an orientation toward sincerity. All four have the potential to support the formation of character and religious identity if these values are truly internalized and consistently embodied in social practice.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Quranic values concerning friendship extend beyond their normative and textual dimensions, functioning as living ethical principles that are continuously received, negotiated, and actualized within Muslim social practices. Through the living Quran perspective, friendship selection emerges as a form of social reception of Quranic teachings, manifested in four principal orientations: prioritizing companions characterized by faith and piety, avoiding relationships that encourage immoral behavior, fostering friendships grounded in mutual moral guidance, and cultivating companionship based on sincerity for the sake of Allah. These findings indicate that friendship in Islam is not merely a social necessity but also a significant mechanism for character formation, moral development, and the reinforcement of religious identity. Consequently, Quranic values serve as an ethical framework that guides Muslims in establishing meaningful and spiritually beneficial social relationships.

The novelty of this study lies in its application of a phenomenological approach within the living Quran framework to examine friendship selection as a form of social reception and lived experience of Quranic values. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on normative interpretations of Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions or on the social influence of friendship, this study highlights how Quranic teachings are understood, negotiated, and embodied in everyday Muslim life. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the advancement of Living

Quran studies by extending its analytical scope to the domain of social relations and friendship practices. Practically, the study provides important implications for the development of Quran-based character education, the strengthening of moral and religious development among young Muslims, and the promotion of constructive social environments that support ethical behavior, religious commitment, and social well-being in contemporary Muslim societies.

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