

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Message patterns through discourse analysis on the concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan among college students practicing Islam

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ABSTRACT

Cultural values, beliefs, and traditions can significantly influence communication patterns related to seeking forgiveness. Within the context of Islam, apologizing during Ramadan is widely regarded as an integral part of religious practices. The significance of apologizing during Ramadan is observed among various Muslim communities, such as in Indonesia and the Philippines. The study aimed to explore how cultural values and religious teachings shape the perception and practice of apology among individuals during the holy month of Ramadan in the Philippines. The research employed a purposive sampling technique, selecting 16 college students who provided valuable insights into the message patterns surrounding apology and forgiveness within their cultural and religious context. The findings highlighted the enduring relevance of cultural and religious beliefs in shaping apology and forgiveness practices, even in the face of modern systems. Despite societal changes, the concept of apology based on cultural and religious values remained significant and remarkable among young Muslim individuals. Cultural and religious beliefs emphasized the importance of maintaining positive relationships with family, friends, relatives, and neighbors through seeking forgiveness and expressing apologies. The study contributed to the existing literature on forgiveness and cultural studies, providing insights into the interplay between cultural values, religious teachings, and apology practices during Ramadan.

Keywords: communication; apologizing; forgiveness; Islamic beliefs; Ramadan

1. Introduction

The concept of apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation have been extensively examined and analyzed across various levels of the intricate human ecological systems in which individuals operate. Different studies had been conducted about apology in home^[1], in schools^[2], in workplaces^[3], in politics^[4], and in international relations^[5]. The conventional notion of apologies as a transactional act between two individuals is undergoing a shift towards a more expansive perspective. The act of apologizing, which has historically been perceived as an interpersonal action, is presently being interpreted in a more expansive manner.

Although different studies had been made in the concept of apology and forgiveness within different aspects of human life, limited studies had been conducted on how apology and forgiveness happen in relation

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to Ramadan and Islamic beliefs in the Philippines.

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyze the message patterns surrounding the concepts of apology and forgiveness during the holy month of Ramadan among college students practicing Islam. By conducting a discourse analysis, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how apology and forgiveness are conceptualized, expressed, and experienced within the context of Ramadan.

In theoretical perspective, Hofstede's Model of culture described culture as "the software of the mind"^[6]. The author elucidates the impact of human experience and the social environment on the human psyche at large, as well as its influence on the development of language. The influence of culture as a cognitive framework extends to all facets of human behavior, including the use and development of language. To ensure effective communication, each linguistic unit, whether it be a word, phrase, or sentence, must align with and be suitable for a given context^[7]. The interdependence of language and culture is a well-established phenomenon. The reflection and expression of cultural values and norms to other cultures can be facilitated through language^[8]. It is important to note that speech utterances are not independent of their environment or context, as these factors play a significant role in shaping and enriching the communication process. Additionally, social and cultural backgrounds also contribute to the development and interpretation of speech utterances.

As a direct perspective, Thanasoulas^[9] states that culture and language are connected stating "...language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives." For instance, in Indonesia, the term "ketupat" originates from the Javanese language which conveys to "confession" or "admitting mistakes"^[10].

When discussing culture, certain individuals may view it as an idiom or symbol. For instance, those who perceive culture as a symbol may attribute a specific significance to it. In a cultural context, the interpretation of a nation's identity as expressed through a cultural idiom is understood by those who possess the necessary cultural knowledge and understanding^[11]. In Islamic beliefs, fasting is commanded by the Qur'an specifically stated, "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may learn self-restraint" (Qur'an 2:183). In Ali^[12] account, the primary purpose of the Islamic fast is to cleanse one's behavior and personality and enrich the soul with the divine qualities of God throughout the entirety of a month-long period. Muslims were taught to be forgiving and should seek for forgiveness because the month of Ramadan is traditionally recognized as the period during which the Qur'an came to light as a source of guidance for humanity^[13].

In the study of Ahmed^[7], Iraqi Arabic speakers frequently engage in nonverbal speech act behaviors as a means of expressing positive politeness. Individuals perceive the act of verbal apology as aversive, despite acknowledging their responsibility to engage in cooperative behavior. Nonverbal behavior may be regarded as a type of politeness strategy, particularly in situations where there is no face-threatening action. In Islamic culture, non-verbal politeness is commonly observed with eye contact and a friendly smile^[7]. This gesture conveys a sense of respect and consideration towards the recipient, whether they are the intended addressee, listener, or a bystander.

Apology and forgiveness in Islam are important cultural belief to strengthen kinship ties and develop good relationship with friends and neighbors^[14,15]. Majority of the literatures on the concept of apology and forgiveness reviewed were in foreign context. Hence, this study employed local analysis within the life of Muslims in the Philippines. This study opened new perspectives on why Filipino college students viewed Ramadan as a holy month of apology and forgiveness. The contents of this study heavily relied on the interpretations of the narratives from interviews in relation to Islamic beliefs and religious teachings.

2. Research objectives

- 1) To describe the concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan.
- 2) To determine how apology and forgiveness happens.
- 3) To determine why apology and forgiveness is common during Ramadan.

3. Methods

This study explored the cultural, religious, and social aspects that shape the understanding of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. Discourse analysis identified the key components and characteristics of apology and forgiveness within the Ramadan context. Analysis done investigated the interpersonal dynamics involved in the process of offering and receiving apologies during Ramadan. To extract relevant information for analysis, this study encouraged participants to share personal stories, anecdotes, and observations about their experiences with apologies and forgiveness during Ramadan.

3.1. Research design

The research design for this study utilized a qualitative approach to explore and analyze the message patterns surrounding the concepts of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan among college students practicing Islam. The study employed a discourse analysis method^[16] to gain a comprehensive understanding of how apology and forgiveness are conceptualized, expressed, and experienced within the context of Ramadan. Gorup^[17] described discourse analysis as “social reality is constructed and given meaning through language use” (p. 2). Herein, this study utilized discourse analysis to identify different patterns in the language use that reflect the culture and social contexts of Ramadan.

The research design incorporated data collection through qualitative method, specifically interviews^[18,19]. This method allowed for in-depth exploration of participants’ experiences, perceptions, and observations related to apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. By encouraging participants to share personal stories, anecdotes, and observations, the study aimed to extract rich and contextually relevant information for analysis.

3.2. Participants and sampling technique

In this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who would provide valuable insights into the message patterns surrounding apology and forgiveness during Ramadan among college students practicing Islam. The purposive sampling method is distinguished by a conscious selection process that seeks to incorporate individuals who exhibit particular characteristics or experiences that are pertinent to the research objectives. Particularly, purposive sampling can be used when a study aims to cover specific differences on the ideas and views of people that are essential to brought into discussion^[20]. **Table 1** presents the basic information of the participants.

Table 1. Basic information of the participants.

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Demographics
Participant 1	Ahmed	M	20	Middle-income household; social sciences student; family of 6 members
Participant 2	Ben	M	19	Low-income household; business student; family of 5 members
Participant 3	Farah	F	20	Low-income household; science student; family of 7 members
Participant 4	Fatima	F	18	Low-income household; science student; family of 6 members

Table 1. (Continued).

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Demographics
Participant 5	Ridwan	M	22	Low-income household; education student; family of 4 members
Participant 6	Ken	M	22	Low-income household; education student; family of 3 members
Participant 7	Fatima	F	21	Middle-income household; engineering student; family of 8 members
Participant 8	Hamza	M	19	Low-income household; education student; family of 7 members
Participant 9	Aisha	F	20	Low-income household; nursing student; family of 5 members
Participant 10	Aminah	F	18	Low-income household; social sciences student; family of 6 members
Participant 11	Mariam	F	23	Middle-income household; nursing student; family of 6 members
Participant 12	Ali	M	22	Low-income household; social science student; family of 4 members
Participant 13	Yusof	M	20	Middle-income household; family of 3 members
Participant 14	Nidzma	F	21	Low-income household; business student; family of 5 members
Participant 15	Hannah	F	20	Low-income household; nursing student; family of 7 members
Participant 16	Mark	M	19	Low-income household; tourism student; family of 5 members

The study’s focus prompted the researchers to carefully choose eight participants who satisfied the pre-established criteria for inclusion. The study’s selection criteria were carefully crafted to guarantee a diverse and representative sample. This was achieved by considering various factors, including but not limited to age, gender, and cultural background.

The researchers identified potential participants who were known to have experiences and knowledge related to apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. Through purposive sampling, the researchers aimed to achieve a balance between depth of understanding and the practical implications associated with data collection and analysis. While a smaller sample size of eight participants may limit generalizability, the focus was on obtaining rich and detailed information from individuals who could provide meaningful contributions to the objectives.

3.3. Research instrument

The development of the interview guide questions adhered to the guide described by Bryman^[21]. The interview questions are structured in a way that encourages participants to reflect on their personal experiences and beliefs regarding apology during Ramadan.

The questions presented in **Table 2** aim to elicit responses that shed light on the participants’ intentional use of apology, the cultural context of apology within their religion, the manifestation and expression of apology, the sincerity of apology during Ramadan, and the reasons why people commonly apologize during this holy month.

Table 2. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview Questions	Participants	n
To describe the concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan.	a. Do you intentionally apologize during Ramadan to someone you have wronged? b. What do you think is the cultural context of apology in your religion?	College students	16
To determine how apology and forgiveness happens.	a. How do you manifest or express your apology? b. In what way you express your sincere apology during the Ramadan?	College students	16
To determine why apology and forgiveness is common during Ramadan.	a. Why people used to apologize to someone during the Ramadan? b. Is it right to assume that the act of apologizing is most common during Ramadan? Why so?	College students	16

The interview questions were designed to address the research objectives by eliciting participants' personal experiences, beliefs, and cultural context related to apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. The one-on-one interview approach allowed for a detailed exploration of participants' responses^[22], enabling a comprehensive analysis of the message patterns and themes surrounding apology and forgiveness within this specific context.

3.4. Data gathering procedure

A permission was obtained from the institutions to which the participants were enrolled. This involved seeking approval from the relevant authorities, such as the president and department heads, who signed an approval letter for each participant. The approval letter provided important information about the study's purpose, terms of confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation.

Once the participants acknowledged and accepted the terms outlined in the approval letter, the interviews were conducted via phone calls. Phone interviews were chosen as the method of data collection, allowing for remote interaction with participants and convenient scheduling. The interviews aimed to gather the necessary data to address the research objectives, providing participants with an opportunity to share their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives on apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. The interviews were audio-recorded for further in-depth assessment of the responses.

The data gathering process took place over a period of five months, from November 2022 to March 2023.

3.5. Data analysis

The data analysis process for this study involved several steps to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and language related to apology and forgiveness during Ramadan among college students practicing Islam. Discourse analysis was employed to extract the message patterns and cultural aspects of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan.

The researcher applied a coding framework to systematically categorize and organize the data. Coding involved identifying meaningful units of information, such as key concepts, themes, or patterns. These codes served as labels that represented the content and meaning of the data.

The coded data was then examined to identify recurring themes or patterns that emerged across the participants' responses. Themes represented prominent concepts or ideas that reflected the message patterns surrounding apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. The researcher looked for connections and relationships between the codes to develop these themes.

The identified themes were interpreted and analyzed to uncover the underlying meanings and implications. The researcher analyzed the relationships between themes and explored the variations and similarities in participants' experiences and perspectives. Interpretation involved extracting insights, drawing conclusions, and answering the research objectives.

4. Results

Objective 1: To describe the concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan.

Theme 1: Personal and silence

Eight (8) out of the 12 respondents stated that forgiveness doesn't need to be posted online. Prayers became the source of forgiveness and acceptance. One respondent highlighted that sometimes we commit mistakes unintentionally, and it is our responsibility to connect with God and free ourselves from anger in order to have a peace of mind and a clear soul when the month of Ramadan comes. The data gathered indicated that forgiveness comes from different ways, one of them is to connect yourself to God and forgive spiritually.

"Apologizing is for me. When there's someone who I'm not in terms with, since it's Ramadan, I forgive them of course. So, I think, I don't need to mention it to them or others, I keep it to myself." [Participant 6]

"There are things you've done before that you don't know someone was hurt. You have made something bad to them before, that you don't know it made them feel bad." [Participant 2]

"What was taught to us, in our religion, when you've done something wrong to someone, as much as possible, we apologize. In our beliefs, when there's someone who hurt us, we were taught to remain silent about it." [Participant 10]

Theme 2: Open and Public

On the other hand, four respondents said that they use to post online for apology and sometimes they apologize through private messages on different social media platforms. One respondent stated that he apologizes through posting online and sending private messages to the person he done wrong.

"I did apologize through online. I can remember posting online or sent a personal message. I did both of these." [Participant 7]

"For me, I am posting my apology. I can explain to other people using online posts." [Participant 5]

"I think some people do open apology. Maybe because they want that the other person knows their serious of their apology to them." [Participant 11]

Objective 2. To determine how apology and forgiveness happens.

Theme 1: Religious Teaching

Four respondents said that we should ask for forgiveness every day since it is thought in Qur'an that Ramadan is not only the way to ask for forgiveness, instead it should be done every day to live peacefully.

"Every day, we should ask for forgiveness from people whom we did something bad. I observe during Ramadan many people ask for forgiveness, most especially online. You can observe also that this is not a planned apology just because it's Ramadan." [Participant 1]

"The Qur'an was given to us by our Prophet. Written here are the things we need to follow to live a happy life. The teachings remind to us that forgiveness is important." [Participant 12]

"In our religion, it's not only during Ramadan we ask for forgiveness but in our daily lifestyle. We need to forgive people and we must ask for forgiveness every day." [Participant 14]

“We are taught that asking for forgiveness must not only be exclusive during Ramadan. We need to do this every time we are not in good terms with other people.” [Participant 13]

Theme 2: Emotional Relief

Three participant expressed apologies and forgive people to relieve themselves from hate and anger. They thought that the Ramadan reminds them to be kind to other people, even to those who had wronged to them.

“During Ramadan, we prepare ourselves... we want to be clean-hearted that we don’t have conflict with other people. We feel that when we forgive and apologize, we are clean-hearted as we commence the month of Ramadan.” [Participant 3]

“Everything in Qur’an shows good deeds. We were taught to be good to other people. So, when you hurt someone, if you can express your apology by giving a forehead kiss, you should do it until that person forgives you.” [Participant 8]

“During Ramadan, we are taught to be good to other people. This holy month absorbs our hatred, it cleans our heart.” [Participant 11]

Objective 3. To determine why apology and forgiveness is common during Ramadan.

All twelve (12) respondents agreed that the month of Ramadan is the date for forgiveness to the Muslim community. However, they gave different perspectives about this topic. Four respondents highlighted that we should ask forgiveness before we die, so before Ramadan comes, we need to ask for forgiveness since we don’t know when our time comes. The other eight (8) respondents stated that every Muslim must follow those teachings of Qur’an about good deed, because it leads them to be forgiven spiritually. The data shows that the teachings of Qur’an help influenced Muslim to accept and forgive before Ramadan comes.

“Based in our observance of Ramadan, the holy week in Islam is all about asking forgiveness.” [Participant 16]

“I think, asking for forgiveness during Ramadan is common because when you feel bad to other people, it may be the reason why you are not privileged to be accepted in the paradise.” [Participant 4]

“It’s common for us Muslims to ask for forgiveness during Ramadan because it’s in our practices in Islam. Although it is not only during Ramadan, but also in our daily lifestyle—we need to be forgiving.” [Participant 11]

“We believe that the holy month of Ramadan is sacred, it’s not only about fasting, but it also tests your patience.” [Participant 15]

“We normalize apologizing during the Ramadan because we don’t know when we will die. We don’t know if when will be our death or the death of other people. If we hold hatred against them, we will carry this hatred when they suddenly die.” [Participant 9]

5. Discussion

Objective 1: To describe the concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan.

During the month of Ramadan, which is a period of fasting and introspection in the Islamic faith, college students emphasize the act of forgiving others, suggesting that they place a higher value on forgiveness than on explicitly seeking apologies. They tend to internalize their expressions of forgiveness and apology, rather than externalizing them by communicating them to the person with whom they have a conflict with.

It is widely known that apologizing during Ramadan is part of religious practices in Islam^[23–25]. The study of Komarudin and Rohmah^[23] in Indonesia indicated that practices in apologizing before fasting aim to have a good relationship with families, friends, relatives, and neighbors. Filipinos also manifested similar belief system, even among young individuals. Filipino young adults in this study apologize before or during Ramadan

to end in good terms with other people indicating, “*when you’ve done something wrong to someone, as much as possible, we apologize*” [Participant 10]. Some areas in Indonesia conduct traditions for family gatherings, sharing, and thanksgiving locally called as *Megengan*^[26].

This current study had an emergent concept of apology and forgiveness during Ramadan. Apart from traditional, some people publicly apologize to express their sincerity. However, the patterns of apology remain consistent even in online setting, as long as the meaning and essence of the statement feel sincere and clear. Communication studies about apology speech argued that the people involved in the communication must be well-familiar with shared knowledge of their culture and traditions^[7,27].

“In different societies and different communities, people speak differently; these differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic, they reflect different cultural values, or at least different hierarchies of values; different ways of speaking, different communicative styles, can be explained and made sense of in terms of independently established different cultural values and cultural priorities”^[28].

Participants were culturally aware of how their religion value forgiveness. Cultural studies indicated that cultural values and traditions could reflect how people communicate as ask forgiveness^[7,28]. Previous studies^[29] argued that Islamic concept of apology and forgiveness shifted towards technology and convenient, and developed mode of communicating through online. However, the cultural purpose remain consistent as apology has to be sincere and heart-felt. In essence, apologizing directly and explicitly enhance social relationship which relates to the concept of solidarity and spiritual empathy^[7,29–31]. One participant in this study suggested that “*they want that the other person knows their serious of their apology to them*” [Participant 11]. Notably, cultural perspectives on apologizing during Ramadan showed important components of speech and language mechanisms. However, in general sense, Muslims believed that if a person truly repents, forgiveness should be shown.

Patterns of language use in apologies indicated specific cultural contexts. Islamic beliefs stressed the importance of apology and specifically given practical situations e.g., when Prophet Joseph apologized to their father prophet Yaqoob saying, “*oh our father, seek refuge for us, for verily we are in the wrong*”^[32].

Essentially, this study indicated that belief systems in Islam influenced how people perceived apology during Ramadan. It was clear that religious teachings prompted Filipino Muslims to seek for forgiveness. Although modern systems emerged, the concept of apology based on cultural and religious belief remained significant and remarkable among young individuals.

Objective 2: To determine how apology and forgiveness takes place.

It is observed that a significant number of individuals seek forgiveness during the holy month of Ramadan. The findings indicate that the spiritual ambiance during Ramadan may facilitate introspection and prompt individuals to readily seek forgiveness. The participants of the study have highlighted that the Qur'an comprises of teachings that underscore the importance of forgiveness.

The data gathered from the interviews suggests that the participants hold forgiveness as a fundamental tenet of their religious beliefs. The practice in question is not solely linked to the holy month of Ramadan but is considered a routine activity based on the teachings of the Qur'an.

It is not new that the concept of forgiveness can be observed during Ramadan. In fact, holy Qur'an explicitly expressed the concept of apologizing in approximately 12 verses^[30]. For instance, for us to be forgiven in our sins, we also need to forgive other people for what they did^[14,15]. In Shirazi^[15] account, from Du'a of Abu Hamza Al-Thumali, it reads:

“You have ordered us to forgive the person who oppresses us, however You are much more worthy to forgive us who have been oppressive to our own selves...”

Some college students believed that the month of Ramadan prepares them to be clean from any form of sin. One participant said, “*we want to be clean-hearted that we don’t have conflict with other people*” [Participant 3]. Islamic beliefs highlighted that apologizing and accepting the apology is a key to happy life and is considered as one thing to have spiritual progress^[15]. One participant mentioned, “*written [in the holy Qur’an] are the things we need to follow to live a happy life*” [Participant 1]. This study figured out that the practice of apologizing during Ramadan has a significant religious context. The participants thought that apologizing ensured their souls are being cleaned and their hearts are being freed from hate and anger. In that sense, they were ready to accept their God within their heart.

Furthermore, the holy Qur’an also states, “Pardon them and overlook – Allah loves those who do good” (Qur’an 5:13). Acknowledging mistakes and apologizing is a good act in which a person will receive the pleasure from Allah. This certainly blesses those who acknowledges and accept mistakes^[14]. One participant mentioned that “*we were taught to be good to other people*” [Participant 8] and that being forgiving is a form of good deed because they accept people as an imperfect being.

Although this study heavily relied on narratives of Muslim students, their statement patterns showed their consistent Islamic practice. Their statements represent how they perceived forgiveness within the context of religion. This further explains why correlational studies^[33–36] observed positive correlation how religious belief can influence higher reasoning for forgiveness. This study further elaborated that those who reflect Qur’an as their standard for forgiveness tend to accept and express apology. Similar interpretations were upheld by McCullough et al.,^[37] indicating that religious teachings enrich the spiritual values.

Clearly, the concept of apology is embedded within the fabric of Islamic beliefs^[24,30]. Some Muslim students considered Ramadan as an important aspect of their religion and it reminds them to be good to other people, be forgiving, and patient. Faith in Islam made people be motivated in accepting apologies and forgiving people as well as recognizing their mistakes.

Objective 3: To determine why apology and forgiveness is a common practice during Ramadan.

There were deep interpretations on why apology and forgiveness were notably part of celebration of Ramadan. Participants stressed that Ramadan is not solely about fasting but also serves as a test of one's patience. This interpretation implies that the act of asking for forgiveness during Ramadan is connected to the broader theme of self-discipline, self-reflection, and personal growth.

Asking for forgiveness during Ramadan is common because it is believed that one's acceptance into paradise may be hindered if they were not able to forgive people. The concept of forgiveness was not only an act of personal growth and reconciliation but also a means to gain spiritual blessings and rewards.

Ramadan is a month of patience and sacrifices and that the patience Muslim experience during Ramadan is a gift and glad tiding^[38]. Abu-Nimer and Nasser^[39] explained that believers “avoid major sins and acts of indecency and when they are angry they forgive” (Qur’an 42:37). Allah commends forgiveness and restitution, but the penalty for sin is evil. This explained why one participant in the study said, “*asking for forgiveness during Ramadan is common because when you feel bad to other people, it may be the reason why you are not privileged to be accepted in the paradise*” [Participant 4].

In addition to fostering better relationships with people through reputation and respect, forgiving others enables individuals to ask for forgiveness for their own misdeeds in the afterlife^[40]. Shirazi account reads:

“The person who does not accept the apology of the individual who has come to him asking forgiveness—whether the apology is truthful or untruthful—shall never have the benefit of my intercession since my intercession is specifically reserved for those who make mistakes and errors.”

In the case of Filipino students, Ramadan is their way to forgive people and express their apologies. Ramadan is not only fasting, but it represents their sacrifices, their virtues, and willingness to accept their mistakes and forgive people. One believed that *“if we hold hatred against them, we will carry this hatred when they suddenly die”* [Participant 9] and regrets might follow because of their reluctance to apologize or forgive.

Notably, participants viewed Ramadan as a period of sacrifices within the concept of apology and forgiveness. One participant noted that *“the holy month of Ramadan is sacred, it’s not only about fasting, but it also tests your patience”* [Participant 15]. Basically, some Muslims believed that the essence of Ramadan is to sacrifice yourself—surrender your ego, hate, and anger—to open your heart to solemn commencement of Ramadan. As Shairazi^[15] stressed out, asking for forgiveness proves the greatness of an individual and that the highness grants them a high nature. *“We need to be forgiving”* [Participant 11] because Muslims were taught to be forgiving to those who wronged to them. As stated, “And I have said! Seek forgiveness from your Lord. Lo! He is oft-forgiving (if you ask for forgiveness). He will give you plenty of rain, He will give you wealth and sons, and assign you Heaven and Rivers in the Heaven” (Qur’an 71:10–12).

6. Limitations of the study

While this study provided valuable insights about the concept of apologizing during the celebration of Ramadan, some limitations were prominent in this study. This study mainly focused on the individual ideas and perceptions of Muslim college students. Although this can be a starting point in a rigorous analysis, relying mainly on perceptions delimits the extent of the study. With that, future studies might consider long-term longitudinal and observational studies that can be used to observe person’s behavior without interrupting with them. In this sense, the analysis can provide promising insights.

The study heavily relies on narratives from college students who practice Islam. Although these participants were consistent in their Islamic practice and provided valuable perspectives, the sample size appears to be relatively small. This limitation could impact the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population of Muslims, especially considering the diversity within the Muslim community in terms of cultural, geographical, and religious practices. Islamic beliefs and practices can vary significantly among individuals and communities while these can evolve over time, and the concept of apology during Ramadan may be influenced by changing cultural and societal factors.

7. Conclusion

Apologizing during Ramadan is embedded within the religious practices in Islam, aiming to have a good relationship with family, friends, relatives, and neighbors. Some people publicly apologize to express their sincerity, but the patterns of apology remain consistent, whether in traditional or online settings, as long as the apology feels sincere and clear. Cultural values and traditions play a significant role in how people communicate and ask for forgiveness, and apologizing directly and explicitly enhances social relationships. Remarkably, the belief systems in Islam influence how people perceive apology during Ramadan, and the concept of apology based on cultural and religious beliefs remains significant among young individuals.

In the nature of their beliefs, Muslims thought that if a person truly repents, forgiveness should be given. The Qur’anic teachings emphasize the value of forgiveness, and Islamic beliefs connect with the idea of apologizing. Based on the Qur’anic teachings, the study’s participants saw forgiving others as a regular practice

and held the belief that doing so promotes happiness and spiritual growth. The participants viewed Ramadan as a chance to purge their hearts of hatred and resentment, and they saw forgiving others as a type of good deed, recognizing them as imperfect individuals.

Ramadan is not solely about fasting but also serves as a period of self-discipline, self-reflection, and personal growth. Asking for forgiveness during Ramadan is seen as an essential practice connected to the broader theme of patience and sacrifice. It is said that asking for forgiveness is a way to find personal peace as well as a way to gain spiritual benefits and rewards. Muslims are urged to practice forgiveness because it is seen as a virtue, and because it is thought that harboring resentment and refusing to forgive can have unfavorable effects in the afterlife. The essence of Ramadan involves sacrificing one's ego, hate, and anger and opening the heart to forgiveness. Muslims are taught to seek forgiveness from their Lord, as it is believed to bring forth abundance and heavenly rewards.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, JVC, JTC and HGA; methodology, JVC, JTC and HGA; software, JTC and HGA; validation, JVC; formal analysis, JVC, JTC and HGA; investigation, JVC, JTC and HGA; resources, JVC, JTC and HGA; data curation, JVC, JTC and HGA; writing—original draft preparation, JVC, JTC and HGA; writing—review and editing, JVC, JTC and HGA; visualization, JVC, JTC and HGA; supervision, JVC, JTC and HGA; project administration, JVC, JTC and HGA; funding acquisition, JVC, JTC and HGA. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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