

Exploring The Interplay between Undergraduates' Perception of Islamic Communication Ethics and Their Practice in Assertive Communication

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Abstract

Assertive communication, which involves expressing one's demands while respecting others, aligns with the ideals of Islamic communication ethics. While there are similarities, current research must establish a comprehensive connection between these concepts. Previous studies have primarily focused on assertive communication from a Western standpoint, disregarding the valuable perspectives that Islamic ethical principles can provide. Further study is required to investigate the correlation between assertive communication and Islamic communication ethics. This study aims to address this gap by quantitatively analysing Islamic communication ethics practices and assertive communication among Muslim students. Data was collected from 100 participants at an International Islamic University in Malaysia through a questionnaire method. A statistical research showed that there was a correlation between how undergraduate students see Islamic communication ethics and their use of assertive communication. The results emphasise the relevance of integrating Islamic communication ethics into assertive communication, emphasising the centrality of ethical factors in interpersonal relationships.

Keywords: Islamic Communication Ethics, Assertive Practices, Interpersonal Skills, Perception

Introduction

Effective communication is essential for navigating various aspects of life, including relationships, work, and mental wellbeing (Ratna, 2019). Among the plethora of communication styles, assertiveness stands out as a crucial skill. Assertive communication fundamentally entails expressing oneself truthfully and respectfully, maintaining integrity both towards oneself and the audience (Pfafman, 2017; Hemavathy & Devi, 2016). Notably,

these two principles are also advocated in Islam as integral components of ethical communication.

Ethical communication holds paramount importance in conveying Islam's ethics, faith, and morality to others, particularly in today's interconnected world, facilitated by the internet, where individuals from diverse racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds engage in dialogue. As stated in the Quran verse (16:125), "Invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best...", in which the teaching in Islam is that communication should be conducted with wisdom, sound advice, and gracious debate. Hence, effective communication skills are imperative for offering good advice and engaging in constructive debate. Furthermore, communication not only plays a vital role in spreading Islam to others but also serves as a reflection of Islamic principles themselves.

However, while the fundamental principles of Islamic ethical communication are well-established, there is a need for more specific methodologies to effectively implement these principles. For instance, assertiveness as a communication style offers detailed frameworks for practice. Considering the underlying similarities in principles, investigating assertive communication from an Islamic perspective would facilitate a nuanced comparison between the two concepts. This approach could enable Muslim community to systematically integrate assertiveness as a means to practice Islamic communication ethics more effectively.

Problem Statement

Assertive communication is increasingly recognised as an effective strategy for upholding personal rights while respecting the rights of others, particularly in interpersonal contexts. This concept has gained traction within the Muslim community, particularly in fields such as healthcare, as evidenced by studies conducted by (Kilic and Sevinc, 2018). Similarly, research in communication, such as the study by Hassan (2018), has explored how Muslim women maintain their identity by employing assertiveness alongside non-assertiveness in interpersonal interactions. However, these studies have largely approached assertiveness from a Western perspective, without incorporating values from Islamic communication ethics.

Wok (2012) contends that the prevalence of Western ethical values over Islamic values in assertive communication practices can be attributed to the legacy of Western colonisation in Muslim countries. Post-independence, these countries inherited systems of practices from their colonisers, leading to a dominance of Western communication ideologies. This problem had already been invoked by Fuziah Kartini dated back to year 1989, whereby she argued that the communication core theories and concepts were always associated with the Western ideologies. She had proposed that the Western communication concepts should be approached and embraced into an Islamic perspective.

Today, with the wide use of the internet and social media, individuals from diverse belief systems freely interact and express opinions on various religions, including Islam. Assertiveness is crucial in delineating the boundary between leniency and meticulousness, especially in interpersonal communication. Moreover, the internet has enabled sharing ideas and viewpoints, providing opportunities for individuals to communicate about Islam and its beliefs. It is crucial to examine assertive communication from an Islamic perspective and incorporate Islamic principles and ethics into communication practices since assertiveness plays a significant role in intercultural interactions. This method promotes mutual understanding and polite communication among people from various cultural and religious backgrounds.

Literature Review

Concept of Assertiveness

The increasing interest in assertiveness in communication can be attributed to the shifting perspectives on politeness and ethics in recent decades. Contrary to common perception, "assertive communication" did not solely stem from a concept of boldness but has its origins deeply rooted in psychology. Based on Peneva and Mavrodiev's 2013 research, the origins of this field of study can be traced back to its application in clinical settings in the previous century, specifically for the treatment of mental illness. Over time, different viewpoints on assertiveness have emerged, starting with its role in personal growth within humanistic psychology. It has also been recognised for protecting individual and group rights in pursuing social justice. Additionally, assertiveness has been seen as a way to improve economic participation and increase employability. Its incorporation into other communication fields, especially in corporate, commercial, and educational settings, became more prominent in the 2000s.

Peneva and Mavrodiev's (2013) historical analysis identified three key features inherent to assertiveness: its direct correlation with individual rational thinking, its status as an acquired skill rather than an inborn trait, and its intrinsic connection with ethics, respect, and self-honour. While the first two features are widely accepted among researchers, the nuanced nature of the third feature has spurred further exploration into its implications and applications within the field.

Assertiveness and communication have a mutually beneficial relationship where both parties have advantages. Effective communication is crucial in assertiveness, as it involves confidently expressing oneself. Nevertheless, effective communication is essential for assertiveness to be successful. To truly grasp this dynamic, one must deeply understand the fundamental and complex nature of communication, which is present in every aspect of human interaction. Speakers must carefully choose the most suitable communication style to accomplish specific goals.

Various models of communication styles have been proposed by scholars such as (Waldherr and Muck, 2011; Pipas and Jaradat, 2010; Ames et al., 2017). They frequently compare assertive communication to aggressive and submissive styles. Assertiveness is applicable in various domains and situations, but its core element remains interpersonal communication. Pipas and Jaradat (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of assertive communication definitions provided by different scholars and their application within interpersonal communication. The findings suggest that assertiveness plays a crucial role in effective communication, enabling individuals to express their desires, rights, and boundaries while respecting the perspectives and rights of others.

Effective communication involves aligning verbal and non-verbal messages, such as tone, body language, facial expressions, and timing, to achieve success and effectiveness in communication (Presly, 2022). To use assertive communication, it is important to understand one's own rights and those of others; it is not an innate human communication style, but rather a skill that can be developed through practice and experience. Assertive communication involves expressing oneself honestly and clearly, engaging in polite and respectful discussions, addressing issues and shortcomings directly, expressing frustration and dissatisfaction without resorting to harsh language, and using exact phrases without overstating.

In summary, assertiveness is commonly recognised as a highly effective communication skill in various areas, including relationships, leadership, and business. This method can help gain respect, attain success, increase confidence, and address bullying issues. Assertiveness is widely recognised as the preferred method of communication when compared to aggressive, passive, or passive-aggressive styles. It promotes respectful and effective communication. Research findings on assertive communication can vary due to factors like assertiveness and cultural and gender differences in acceptance.

Assertive Communication in the Islamic Context

Research has been limited in establishing a direct relationship between assertiveness and Islamic communication ethics. To bridge this gap, an examination was conducted comparing the features of assertive communication with those outlined in Islamic regulations. Under this sub-heading, three key features were explored: i) the extension and limitation of ethicality, ii) effectiveness in communication, and iii) mental construction and speech planning.

Extension and Limitation of Ethicality

Within Western contexts, ethical considerations frequently depend on individual and cultural values, resulting in different viewpoints across various cultures and settings. Ethical actions can vary in perception across different cultures, illustrating the expandable and restricted aspects of ethical behaviour. Assertive communication operates within certain boundaries, where actions that cross ethical lines are often seen as aggressive (Phillips & Enderby, 2021). In the context of Islam, the intersection of cultural norms and ethical considerations is shaped by the influence of beliefs in God or faith. Regardless of cultural differences, ethical rulings in Islam are universally based on the principle of respect, a fundamental requirement within the faith. Behaviours that are seen as disrespectful, like using abusive language, are regarded as aggressive and unethical within the context of Islam. The alignment of Islamic values with global ethical norms reflects a universal approach to encompass all humanity (Mowlana, 2007).

Being an Effective Communication

Assertive communication is highly regarded for its efficacy, a principle reflected in Islam, as it encompasses spiritual and worldly matters. Nevertheless, finding an appropriate degree of assertiveness is complex and relies on various factors and the specific situation. Islam firmly opposes aggression and strongly condemns indifference towards matters of faith and individual rights. Islam promotes a balanced approach in all aspects, aligning with the balanced assertiveness concept (Saeed, 2013). Islam recognises the importance of balanced assertiveness but acknowledges that there are times when silence and patience may be more appropriate or when controlled aggression may be necessary as a last resort for addressing oppression and injustice (Jamilin et al., 2017; Saeed, 2013).

Mental Construction and Speech Planning

Being assertive requires a thoughtful approach to understanding the audience and the context of the speech. This aligns with Rahman's (2009) belief that humans need to make a conscious effort to improve themselves. Islam emphasises the importance of prioritising knowledge in every action, requiring cognitive thought processes (Saeed, 2013). The Quran emphasises the importance of selecting words with careful thought, the audience's background, emotions, and mental capacity (Muhammad & Omer, 2016). Intention plays a

crucial role in shaping thoughts and actions, verifying their Islamic validity (Mowlana, 2007). These principles are applicable to all relationships and situations within the boundaries of faith.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

The research objectives for this study

This research is aimed to achieve two objectives

- i. To identify the relationship between undergraduates' perception on Islamic Communication Ethics and their practice in Assertive Communication

The research questions for this study

- i. What is the relationship between undergraduates' perception of Islamic Communication Ethics and their engagement in Assertive Communication practices?

Methodology

This study utilised a meticulous methodology to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the findings. The research process involved a thorough examination of pertinent literature, conducting a questionnaire survey, and a careful examination of the collected data. The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between how undergraduates perceive Islamic Communication Ethics and their involvement in Assertive Communication practices.

Participants

A total of 100 undergraduates from an esteemed international Islamic university in Malaysia were selected as participants using convenience sampling techniques. Prior to their participation, all individuals provided informed consent, demonstrating their willingness to engage in the study after receiving comprehensive information about its objectives and procedures.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire utilised in this study was adapted from previous research conducted by (Ali, 1988; Noonan and Erickson, 2017). Participants were asked to provide responses to a series of items using a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Prior to its full distribution, a pilot test was conducted on a sample of 30 individuals from the population to assess the reliability and clarity of the instrument. The questionnaire comprised three distinct sections: Section A focused on gathering background information about the respondents, Section B examined perceptions of Islamic Communication Ethics, and Section C explored assertiveness in communication.

Procedure

Participants were first provided with a consent form, outlining the purpose and procedures of the study. Clear instructions were then given on how to complete the questionnaire. Utilizing the online platform Google Forms, the survey instrument was distributed, allowing participants to respond at their convenience within a timeframe of approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed to 100 students of the Kulliyah of Languages and Management, IIUM. Sections B and C of the questionnaire contained statements that respondents were asked to rate on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Analysing via SPSS version 29, the scores collected were analysed to determine the frequency of responses for each item. To facilitate clearer presentation and more precise discussion, the items were categorised into smaller themes. Section A was excluded from the analysis as it served as obtaining demographic information.

Section B: Perception of Islamic Communication Ethics

The items in Section B were categorised into six themes: i) respecting the audience, ii) considering the impact of one's speech, iii) respecting the truth, iv) refraining from fabricating information, v) utilising information properly, and vi) respecting others' right to information. Respondents' answers were grouped into 'negative perception,' 'neutral perception,' and 'positive perception,' with 'positive' indicating a perception that aligned with the principles of Islamic communication ethics. The summary of these perceptions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics of Muslim Undergraduates

	Percentage (%)						Total Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics
	Respect Audience	Consider Impact of Speech	Respect Truth	Fabrication Abstinance	Proper Information Usage	Respect Rights to Information	
Negative Perception	2.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8
Neutral Perception	36.0	9.0	2.0	34.0	10.0	16.0	17.8
Positive Perception	62.0	89.0	97.0	64.0	88.0	82.0	80.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.9

Table 1.0 had shown that the samples generally had positive perception towards Islamic communication ethics with the score of 80.3%. Meanwhile, a minor 17.8% indicated neutral perception and a negligible 1.8% on negative perception. The scores on different perceptions were regularly above 80% among different themes, and regularly 2% and below for negative perception. However, two themes were excepted: 'respecting audience' and 'abstinence from fabricating information'. Those themes scored 62% and 64% on positive perception while on moderate perception 36% and 34%, both respectively.

Section C: Practice of Assertiveness Communication

Items in Section C were categorised into four themes: i) expressing oneself openly, ii) engaging in respectful arguments, iii) addressing problems directly, and iv) expressing frustration respectfully. The scores of respondents' answers were graded into levels of assertiveness: 'low assertiveness,' 'moderate assertiveness,' and 'high assertiveness.' Table 2 presents a summary of assertiveness levels among Muslim undergraduates in communication.

Table 2

Practice of Assertive Communication Among Muslim Undergraduates

Percentage (%)

	<i>Express Self</i>	<i>Argue Respectfully</i>	<i>Direct on Problems</i>	<i>Express Frustration Respectfully</i>	<i>Total Practice of Assertive Communication</i>
<i>Low Assertiveness</i>	2.0	2.0	10.0	6.0	5.0
<i>Moderate Assertiveness</i>	67.0	13.0	75.0	73.0	57.0
<i>High Assertiveness</i>	31.0	85.0	15.0	21.0	38.0
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

According to the analysis, the respondents predominantly exhibited moderate assertiveness in communication, with a score of 57%. However, high assertiveness was less common, with only 38% of respondents scoring in this range. Notably, the theme 'arguing respectfully' received the highest score for high assertiveness, at 85%. In contrast, the remaining three themes scored between 15% and 38% for high assertiveness, while ranging from 67% to 75% for moderate assertiveness. It's important to note that all four themes scored 10% or less for low assertiveness, totalling only 5% cumulatively.

Inferential Analysis

The relationship between the independent variables (IV) and the dependent variable (DV) in this study was assessed using Pearson’s correlation coefficient score and presented through a scatter plot graph. Specifically, the IV was defined as 'Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics', while the DV was identified as 'Practice of Assertive Communication'.

IV	Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics
DV	Practice of Assertive Communication

Pearson Correlation Coefficient

Two hypotheses were formulated prior to conducting the Pearson Correlation Coefficient analysis: the null hypothesis (H_0), which posits that there is no significant relationship between the independent variable (IV) and the dependent variable (DV), and the alternative hypothesis (H_A), which suggests that there is a significant relationship between the IV and DV. The analysis yielded an Alpha value (α), a significance value (p), and assessed the strength of the relationship. H_0 is rejected and H_A is accepted when the p-value is lower than α . If H_A is accepted, the strength of the relationship is interpreted according to Cohen's (1988) scale.

H_0	There is no significant relationship between IV and DV
H_A	There is a significant relationship between IV and DV

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient test was initially conducted on the entire dataset, encompassing Section B (representing the IV) and Section C (representing the DV). The test returned an α value of 0.01, a p-value of 0.000, and a correlation strength of 0.554 which indicated moderate positive correlation. As the p-value was lower than α , the null hypothesis

(H₀) was rejected, leading to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H_A). This indicates a significant relationship between the IV and DV, with a correlation strength of 0.554.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis Between Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics and Practice of Assertiveness

Correlations

		Practice of Assertive Communication
Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics	on Pearson Correlation	.554**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	100

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To further comprehend the results, an additional analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between the IV and the four themes encompassed by the DV: i) expressing oneself, ii) arguing respectfully, iii) addressing problems directly, and iv) expressing frustration respectfully. As the perception of Islamic communication ethics served as the IV, separate tests were not conducted for each individual theme. The outcomes of this analysis are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4

Correlation Analysis Between Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics and Practice of Assertiveness (According to Themes)

Correlations

		Express Self	Argue Respectfully	Direct on Problems	Express Frustration Respectfully
Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics	Pearson Correlation	-.246*	.633**	.482**	.633**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	.000	.000	.000
	N	100	100	100	100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Upon conducting the test, three themes displayed a significant correlation with the IV, while the fourth theme, 'expressing oneself,' yielded an insignificant result with a p-value of 0.014, lower than the α of 0.05. Notably, 'expressing oneself' exhibited a negative correlation coefficient, contrary to the other three themes. Both 'arguing respectfully' and 'expressing frustration respectfully' demonstrated a correlation coefficient of 0.633, indicating a strong relationship, as per (Cohen, 2013). Meanwhile, 'addressing problems directly' exhibited a correlation coefficient of 0.482, signifying a moderate relationship.

Given the results of the second test, a further analysis was conducted to investigate the items under the theme 'expressing oneself' that contributed to the insignificant relationship and negative correlation coefficient. These items included 'expressing opinions even when

disagreed,' 'desire to voice one's thoughts,' 'avoiding asking questions to avoid appearing ignorant,' 'suppressing emotions,' and 'sharing one's feelings.' The detailed findings of this test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Correlation Analysis Between Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics and Expressing Self Correlations

		Express even if disagreed	Wish to say what on mind (N)	Avoid asking question to not sound stupid (N)	Bottle up emotions (N)	Tell people feeling
Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics	Pearson Correlation	.277**	-.423**	-.362**	-.331**	.235*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.000	.001	.019
	N	100	100	100	100	100

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

(N) Negative items, whereby the scores were inverted before calculated together with other items.

The test results revealed that two items, 'expressing opinions even when disagreed' and 'sharing one's feelings,' displayed an insignificant relationship with the IV. Despite this, both items exhibited positive correlation coefficients of 0.277 and 0.235, respectively. However, these coefficients suggested weak relationships. Conversely, the remaining three items demonstrated negative correlations of weak to moderate strength with the IV, despite their significant relationships.

Scatter Plot

A scatter plot graph, with a quadratic fit line generated using SPSS, was utilized to illustrate the relationship between the IV and DV, as depicted in Figure 1. The graph revealed a discernible pattern of a positive relationship between the IV and DV. However, the scattered data points were predominantly spread out from the fitted line, suggesting a moderate rather than a strong correlation.

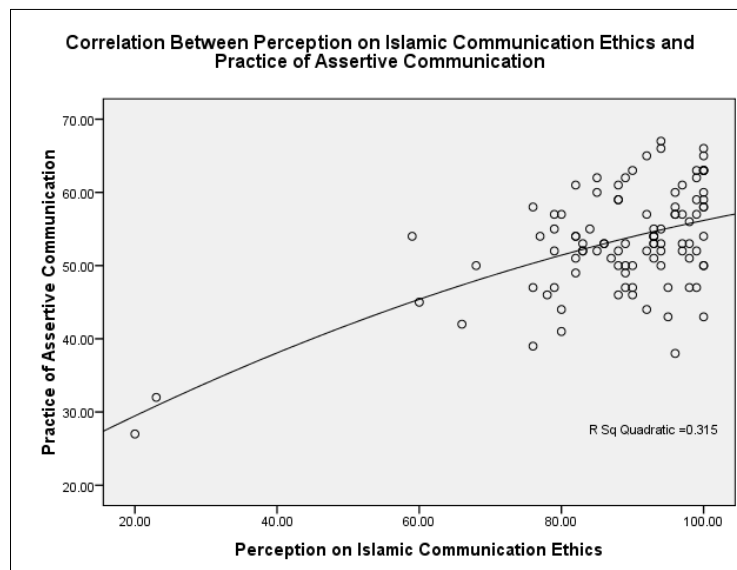


Figure 1: Correlation Between Perception on Islamic Communication Ethics and Practice of Assertive Communication

Discussion

Perception of Islamic Communication Ethics

The results of this survey show that, with an overall accuracy score of 80.3%, respondents had a generally good grasp of Islamic communication ethics. This aligns with Mowlana's (2007) description of communication in Islam, emphasising its adherence to moral principles. However, respondents scored lower, between 62% to 64%, in terms of their perception regarding respecting the audience and refraining from fabricating information. It appears that the respondents may not be well-versed in the importance of Muslims being mindful of how their words can impact others, as emphasised by (Muhammad and Omer, 2016; Saeed, 2013).

Perception and Practice of Assertiveness in Communication

Based on the data collected, it appears that there is a moderate level of assertiveness among the participants, as indicated by a score of 57%. It is intriguing to note that the way respondents perceive assertiveness does not align with the conceptual definition. This suggests that their behaviour may be more influenced by Islamic teachings rather than conventional assertiveness principles. The literature highlights the significance of maintaining a balanced assertiveness approach as a highly effective communication strategy (Ames, 2008). The study reveals a balanced approach to assertiveness, indicating that respondents value respectful and constructive communication more than assertive behaviour that could be seen as aggressive or confrontational. This finding provides additional evidence that the practice of assertiveness among the participants is influenced by Islamic principles, emphasising the connection between assertiveness and Islamic communication ethics.

Perception of the Relationship Between Islam and Assertiveness

The analysis indicates a moderate strength of relationship (correlation index of 0.554) between perception of Islamic communication ethics and the practice of assertiveness. Deeper analysis reveals that perception of Islamic communication ethics has a strong relationship with the themes of 'arguing respectfully' and 'expressing frustration respectfully', and a moderate relationship with 'being direct on problems', but an insignificant correlation

with 'expressing self'. This suggests that respondents may primarily practice assertiveness in manners aligned with Islamic principles, particularly emphasizing respect in communication.

Additionally, while 33.33% of respondents cited reasons for being assertive related to personal improvement such as self-discipline and self-image, these themes were not directly related to Islam. However, they align with the idea that communication strategies grounded in Islamic values should also yield practical benefits in worldly life, as suggested by (Azad, 2015). This supports the notion of balanced assertiveness as an effective communication strategy, as proposed by Ames (2008), further reinforcing the hypothesis that the application of assertiveness is in line with Islamic values.

Conclusion

Significance of Research

This study addresses a significant research gap by examining assertiveness through the lens of Islam, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this area. Studying the perception and practice of assertiveness among Muslim students is an essential aspect of integrating Islamic concepts into the understanding of assertiveness. The difference between the academic concept of assertiveness and how it is understood by the population being studied emphasises the importance of considering assertiveness within the framework of Islamic communication ethics. This analysis contributes to scholarly discussions on assertiveness and aims to raise awareness of its significance within Islamic principles and Muslim society, thereby promoting assertiveness among Muslims.

Moreover, this research has practical implications alongside its academic significance. This analysis provides valuable insights into the understanding and practice of assertiveness from an Islamic perspective, highlighting its alignment with Islamic principles. This endeavour demonstrates significant progress in incorporating assertiveness with Islamic teachings and values. In addition, the findings could offer valuable insights for developing assertiveness training programmes, particularly for Muslim communities. According to Putri et al (2023), the study suggests that group mentorship programmes that employ aggressive training methods can effectively improve students' interpersonal communication skills. By integrating Islamic communication ethics into assertiveness training, these programmes can provide a culturally sensitive approach to promoting effective communication. They create a supportive environment for practising assertive communication while respecting Islamic values.

Limitations of Research

It is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the limitations of this research, especially when considering the impact of cultural, gender, and environmental factors on assertive communication. Due to limitations in time, budget, and the size of the sample, a comprehensive investigation of these aspects was not possible during the study. In addition, considering that the study was carried out among students at an Islamic institution in Malaysia, the results may have limited relevance to individuals from different cultural backgrounds. To ensure more accurate and comprehensive results, it is recommended that future studies employ stratified sample methods and give more significant consideration to these aspects.

Recommendations

Establishing a consistent approach for demographic variables such as language and ethnicity would enhance the reliability of future studies. In addition, implementing gender-based

stratified sample methods could reduce the impact of external factors on assertive behaviour. Conducting similar studies among individuals with similar backgrounds is recommended to enhance the credibility of this study and ensure the accuracy of the findings. This would provide additional validation for the results. Future researchers may also consider utilising qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents about this research topic. Additionally, future researchers may also investigate whether there is a moderating effect of trust on the relationship between assertive communication and Islamic communication ethics.

Overall Contribution

The present study effectively addresses the knowledge gap regarding the relationship between assertive communication and Islamic communication ethics. The study emphasises the significance of moderation and ethical considerations in assertive behaviour within Islamic settings by examining the attitudes and behaviours of assertiveness among Muslim students. The findings of this study have important implications for the design of assertiveness training programmes specifically tailored to Muslim communities. Additionally, they contribute to the ongoing discussion on assertiveness within an Islamic framework. Ultimately, the presented study contributes to our comprehension of assertiveness within the context of Islam, establishing an essential foundation for future studies in this field.

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