Preserving and Promoting Faith Through a Digital Society:
An Islamic Governance Perspective

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Abstract: The digital transformation has changed almost every aspect of people's life, including conducting religious rituals. Being able to practise the religion during the pandemic lockdown is crucial for faith preservation and promotion. This study aims to examine how digitalization was harnessed in conducting Islamic ritual in Brunei for faith preservation and promotion. Data is gathered from multiple sources; a) documents, b) social media and c) observations. Analysis was carried out using the Islamic Governance Maqāṣid Collaborative Framework and analyzed at societal and governance levels. Results from the study showed that performing Islamic rituals online has been widely practiced by many in the country and has indeed helped preserve and promote faith during the pandemic.

1. Introduction

Interconnectivity between religion and internet is not new (Campbell, 2006, 2017). Indeed, the internet has allowed room for religious consumption (Humeira & Sarwono, 2019) and rituals (Casey, 2006). Discussion on online religious rituals was limited to Christianity with little mention of Islam (Campbell, 2012). Cyber Islamic Environments (Bunt, 2003) was discussed without mentioning Islamic Societies. Religious belief and practices (Eickeman, 2018) was affected by rapid digitalization that coincidentally collide with a public health crisis in the form of Covid-19.

Covid-19 has led to forced digitalization in everything, including religious practices. Religious communities found themselves unable to connect with each other due to closure of religious sites. Religious sites closure affects all religious communities, particularly the Muslims. The Muslims' first encounter with Covid-19 mass spread happened in a mosque (Star, 2020). Hence, it is imperative for Islamic religious rituals to move online to avoid repetitions of such incidents.

Yet, there is a need to preserve and promote faith during the pandemic. Social distancing has led to an increase in mental health issues, leading to a need for religious support (Dutra & Rocha, 2021). Religious support through faith communities serve as a "social immune system" (Gunderson & Cutts, 2021) that can help reframe the Covid-19 recovery strategy. However, much research on preservation and promotion of faith in response to Covid-19 all focus on Christianity (Beyerlein, Nirenberg & Zubrzycki, 2021; Dutra & Rocha, 2021). Aside from a short op-ed on faith, politics and the pandemic in Turkey by Alyanak (2021) and faith-driven civic engagement in Iran (Marvi, Shahraini, Yazdi & Maleki, 2021), research on preservation and promotion of the Islamic faith during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially within the context of digital society is still limited.

This study focused on how the Islamic faith can be preserved and promoted through various digital means in Brunei. Brunei has an extremely high internet penetration rate, with 536,589 mobile phone subscriptions and a 120.2% internet penetration rate (Department of Statistics, 2020). Brunei has enacted Islamic Law under the Sharia Penal Code Order (2013) and strives to become a zikir nation (Mahmud, 2021) that is considered a "Baldatun Tayyibatun Warabbun Ghafur" - a country that is under the protection of Allah (Tema Hari Kebangsaan, 2021).

This paper is structured as follows. The literature review section provides an overview of digital society and Islamic Governance, focusing on the preservation and promotion of faith. No study has ever been conducted on digital society's role in faith preservation and promotion in the context of Brunei, especially during Covid-19. This is followed by methodology, results and discussion. The study concludes with a discussion on how different Islamic rituals serves to preserve and promote faith during the pandemic through analysis according to the Maqāṣid Collaborative Framework.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Digital Society

Digital society is defined by how society adopts and integrates information and communication technologies in every aspect of life (Foundation, 2021). It is a society characterized by information flowing through global networks at unprecedented speeds (Redshaw, 2019), and digital innovations often come into play to reshape the socio-cultural aspects, economy, and industries in order to create an inclusive, secure and sustainable digital society (Hasmawati et al., 2020; Razzaq et al., 2018). Furthermore, the fourth

wave of the industrial revolution (IR 4.0), entails a digital realm creation bridging the gap between the virtual and real worlds. ICT is becoming the foundation of this change. Today, more than ever, the future of nations hinges on how well governments can coordinate digital activity among businesses and individuals (Bikalenko et al, 2021; Anshari & Hamdan, 2022; Anshari, Hamdan, Ahmad, Ali & Haidi, 2022).

2.2. Islamic Governance

An Islamic system of governance pertains to a Muslim's ideals of how to govern Islamically in response to the demands of society and the government of their time. Amin's Islamic Governance consists of tauḥīdic notions, juristic processes, and rules, and Qur'ānic values constructed within a socio-political cultural context gearing organizations to achieve their strategic objectives – the Maqāṣid of the Sharī'ah; a) preservation and promotion of faith, b) preservation and promotion of life, c) preservation and promotion of intellect, and d) preservation and promotion of wealth (Abdul Aziz, 2019). The concept of an Islamic Governance is founded upon the Qur'ān and illustrated in the Prophetic Sunnah via the Rasūl on the individual level, societal level, and the governance level (Figure 1).
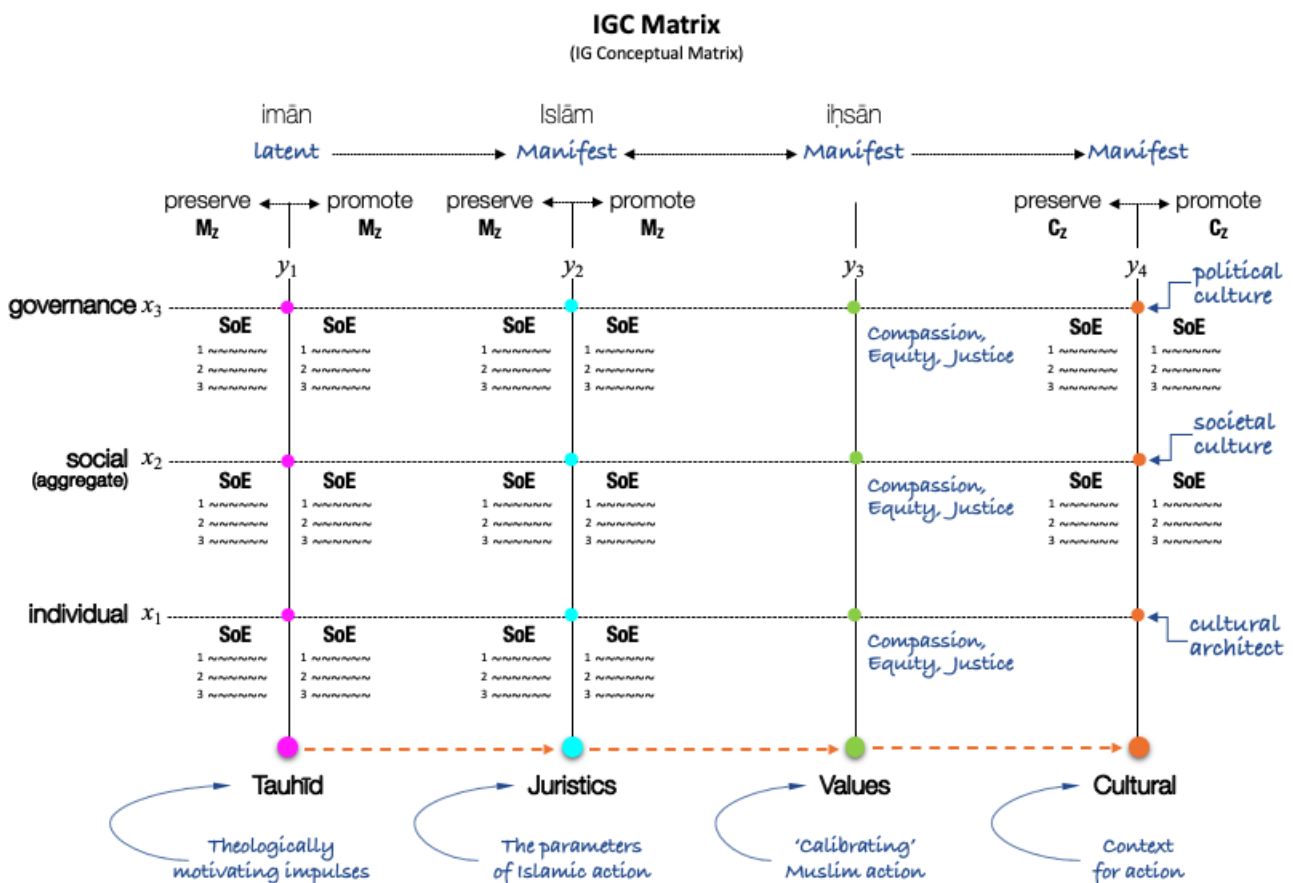

Figure 1: The Islamic Governance Conceptual Matrix (Source: Abdul Aziz, 2019)

Amin's *Maqasid* Collaborative Framework (MCF) in Figure 2 is based on the premise that the *Maqasid* of the *Shari'ah* support one another. As the *Maqasid* are compiled from the Qur'an, its organization mirrors the Qur'an. The Qur'anic verses are explained by other Qur'anic verses, thus they are mutually explanatory. Similarly, to 'grasp' one *Maqasid*, the deliberation of the four other Maqasid are vital. Each Maqasid cannot be realized without the other Maqasid. It thus requires a collaborative and coordinated effort with others who are engaging in the other *Maqasid*. In relation to the Islamic Governance Conceptual Framework, the combination of the two means the accomplishment of a *Maqasid* can occur on the individual level, the societal level, or the governance level. Within an Islamic System of Governance, to create a society conducive for the worship of Allah, collaboration is crucial to its success. Allah says to (help one another in goodness and piety) (Qu'ran, Surah Al-Ma'idah, verse 2), demonstrating that working together in acts of goodness and piousness is extremely encouraged in Islam.
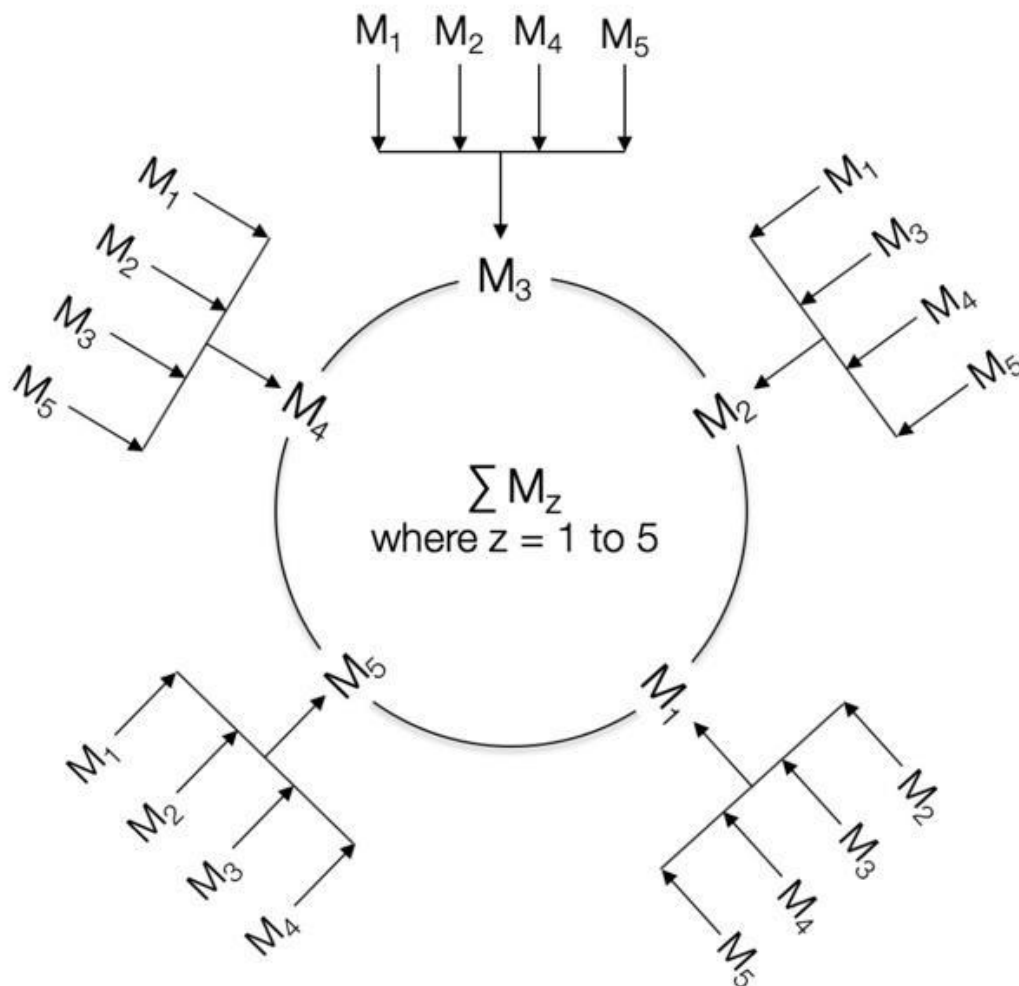

Figure 2: The Maqasid Collaborative Framework (source: Abdul Aziz, 2019)

This study aimed to investigate how digital means were used to conduct islamic rituals in Brunei during the pandemic, an area little researched in the literature. Conducting this research in the Bruneian context is timely given country's aspiration to transform into a "Smart Nation"

by means of establishing a digital and future-ready society and a digitally conducive ecosystem by 2025 (Azahari,2021)

3. Method

This study employed a case study methodology (Yin, 2017). It is a single case study, whereby the case was bounded within Brunei.

3.1. Data Sources

Data was gathered from three sources: a) documents, b) Social Media Accounts and c) Authors' own observation, seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Data types and sources in the study

Data Type	Data Source
Documents	Newspapers
	Government documents (press releases)
	Government websites
Social Media Accounts	GOV.BN Telegram Channel
	Government Instagram accounts
	Non-Governmental organizations' Instagram accounts
	Corporations' Instagram accounts
	Religious Instagrammers' accounts
Observation	Authors' own observation of the digital Islamic rituals

3.2. Data Analysis

All data sources mentioned in Section 3.2. was first categorized according to the four digital Islamic rituals in Table 2.

Table 2: Digital Islamic Ritual Categorization

Digital Islamic Ritual
Digital Dakwah
Digital Tilawah
Digital Communal Prayers including Tahlil and Zikir
Digital Donation including Zakat

Categorized data was then analyzed using the Islamic Governance Conceptual Matrix (Figure 1) to determine whether the initiative was grassroot-led or governance-led. Analysis was then linked using the Maqāṣid Collaborative Framework (Figure 2).

4. Results and Discussion

Preservation of faith and life are crucial issues within Islam (see Figure 3). Indeed, the need to preserve life was the main reason why many of the rituals moved or stayed online during the pandemic, even though mosques and religious arenas were closed (MORA Website, 2020). Figure 4 illustrates how lockdown initiatives (preservation and promotion of life) led towards the preservation and promotion of intellect, progeny and wealth through digital dakwah, digital tilawah, digital communal prayers and digital donation.

It was narrated that 'Abdullah bin Salam said:

"When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) came to Al-Madinah, the people rushed towards him and it was said: 'The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) has come!' I came along with the people to see him, and when I looked at the face of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), I realized that his face was not the face of a liar. The first thing he said was: "O people, spread (the greeting of) Salam, offer food to people and pray at night when people are sleeping, you will enter Paradise in peace."

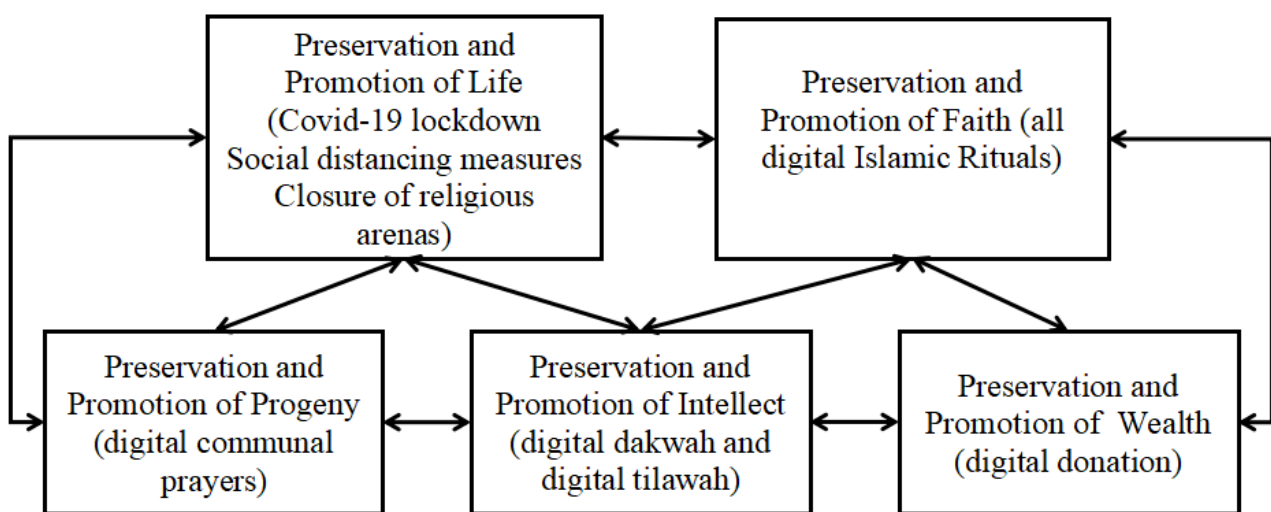**Figure 3**: Hadith from Ibnu Majah (Source: Sunnah.com, Sunan Ibn Majah 1334)

Figure 4: The interlinkage between the preservation and promotion of faith, preservation and promotion of life and the three other Maqṣad.

These digital rituals were initiated on both grassroot-level (Societal level), as well as governance level (State level) (Table 3). Governance level is composed of rituals initiated by the State through the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), Pusat Dakwah Islamiah / Islamic Dakwah Center (PDI) and various mosques within MORA. Societal level composed of rituals initiated by non-governmental bodies, Mosque Youths Association (Belia Masjid), Islamic banks such as Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) and prominent religious Instagrammers.

Table 3: State and Societal-level initiatives

State-Level	Societal Level
Digital Dakwah: digital live "ceramah"	Digital Dakwah: digital live "ceramah" by prominent religious local Instagrammers
Digital Dakwah: digital Mualaf classes	Digital Dakwah: BIBD religious reminders
Digital Dakwah: digital khutba posters shared on GOV.BN Telegram Channel	Digital Dakwah: Instagram posts by prominent religious local Instagrammers
Digital Dakwah: PDI digital initiatives	Digital Tilawah: synchronous and asynchronous Quran reading organized by NGOs
Digital Dakwah: MORA Instagram reminders	Digital Tilawah: digital Quran reading organized by Belia Masjid groups
Digital Tilawah: digital Quran competitions	Digital Communal Prayers: Tahlil organized by NGOs
Digital Tilawah: Live readings of Surah Yassin	Digital Communal Prayers: Zikir organized by Belia Masjid Groups
Digital Communal Prayers: Majlis Malam Munajat	Digital Donation: Projek Kongsi Rezeki
Digital Donation: digital Zakat	Digital Donation: Community for Brunei

Notes. MORA: Ministry of Religious Affairs, PDI: Pusat Dakwah Islamiah (Islamic Dakwah Centre).

4.1. Preservation and Promotion of Intellect: Digital Dakwah

Digital Dakwah proliferated in Brunei when mosques and many religious arenas were closed. The need to move dakwah from live space to virtual space is crucial, given how important dakwah is Islamically, as mentioned in the Quran, surah Ali-Imran, verse 104 seen in Figure 5.

وَلْتَكُن مِّنكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى ٱلْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ ٱلْمُنكَرِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

Let there be a group among you who call ˹others˺ to goodness, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil—it is they who will be successful.

Figure 5: Quran Surah Ali-Imran,Verse 104 (source: Quran.com)

Digital dakwah in the form of Islamic reminders were offered by MORA, whereby their Official Instagram account contains similar reminders, such as the "terapi kejiwaan" (soul therapy) series (Kementerian Hal Ehwal Ugama on Instagram, 2021), as well as sharing digital khutba posters on the Gov.BN Telegram Channel.

Digital dakwah was also taken up by grassroot organizations such as NGOs. NGOs like the Brunei Youth Council invited religious scholars to give talks in conjunction with Maulud and World Mental Health Day (Majlis Belia Brunei (MBB), 2021). Belia Masjid groups have also offered digital dakwah through live religious talks via both Facebook (Kelab Belia Masjid RPN Pandan, 2021) and Instagram (Belia Masjid As-Shaliheen, 2021). Instagram was also the platform of choice by many prominent religious Instagrammers such as Yussof Majid (Majid, n.d) and Hanisah Othman (Othman, n.d.) for digital dakwah, and they were joined by religious teachers who used to only offer religious talks face-to-face (Sharifah Khadijah Alkaff, 2021).

Corporations like Islamic banks have also chosen to carry out their Corporate Social Responsibility activities (Hamdan, 2014) through digital dakwah. Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) recently collaborated with Yussof Majid to give a talk on mental health from an Islamic perspective (BIBD on Instagram, 2021), on top of sharing Islamic reminders on their Instagram account.

The move from physical space to virtual space for tilawah was already carried out asynchronously prior to the pandemic, as the main author was part of a WhatsApp group that carried out the One Day One Juz initiative (Nisa, 2018). Hence, for digital tilawah, the pandemic has expanded it through synchronous means via Zoom. The need for tilawah to continue despite the pandemic was due to the many virtues of reading the Quran (Figure 6).

Abu Umamah (May Allah be pleased with him) reported:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) saying, "Read the Qur'an, for it will come as an intercessor for its reciters on the Day of Resurrection."

[Muslim].

عن أبي أمامة رضي الله عنه قال: سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقول: " اقرءوا القرآن فإنه يأتي يوم القيامة شفيعًا لأصحابه" ((رواه مسلم)).

Figure. 6: Hadith on the virtue of tilawah (Source: Sunnah.com, Riyad as-Salihin 991)

Digital tilawah was carried out by both government associations as well as NGOs. One such example of digital tilawah carried out by the government was the live reading of surah Yassin broadcasted by the government-run radio, television and online channels (Ahmad, 2021). In addition to live reading of surah Yassin, digital tilawah was also conducted by MORA when they collaborated with Mosque Youth Groups in September 2021 for a nation-wide khatam Quran event (Majlis Khatam Al-Quran Belia Masjid Senegara, 2021). As for non-governmental organizations, digital tilawah / quran classes to improve Quran reading skills were conducted by one NGO (Nurdiyanah R., 2021).

4.2. Preservation and Promotion of Progeny: Digital Communal Prayer

Communal prayers to seek Allah's help in all things is important in Islam, as seen in the Quran (Figure 7).

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وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِيَ أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ ٦٠

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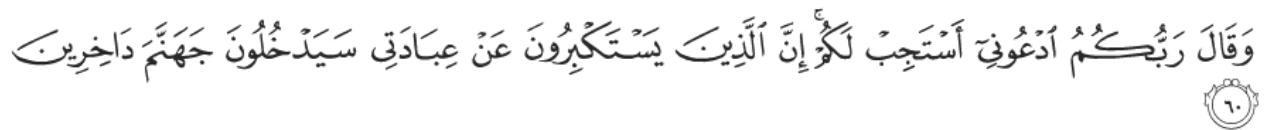
Your Lord has proclaimed, "Call upon Me, I will respond to you. Surely those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell, fully humbled."

Figure 7: Quran verse on call upon Allah for help (Source: Quran.com, Surah Ghafir, Verse 60)

These communal prayers can be in the form of "dua" (prayers), tahlil and zikir. These practices moved digitally during the pandemic. Digital communal prayers carried out during the pandemic were observed for all three rituals.

1. Digital Communal prayers

Digital communal prayers were initiated by MORA through organizing the "Majlis Malam Munajat" event during the partial lockdown to seek Allah's help and protection from Covid-19. The event was conducted online and received enthusiastically by the public (Junaidi, 2021).

2. Digital Tahlil

The pandemic has shifted tahlil, usually carried out in person, to an online space. Moving to an online space did not stop the Bruneian Muslims to continue the practice of tahlil as a form of prayers for the deceased, as prayers from pious children are acts for the deceased (Figure 8).

Abu Huraira (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

When a man dies, his acts come to an end, but three, recurring charity, or knowledge (by which people) benefit, or a pious son, who prays for him (for the deceased).

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " إِذَا مَاتَ الإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلاَّ مِنْ ثَلاَثَةٍ إِلاَّ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ " .

Figure 8: Hadith on acts of a deceased (Source: Sunnah.com, Sahih Muslim 1631)

Digital tahlil was carried out on Societal level by individual families (Online Tahlil, 2020) and NGOs. NGOs such as the Persatuan Siswazah Wanita (Mohamad, 2021) carried out digital tahlil for the late His Royal Highness Prince Azim, and the National Football Association Brunei Darussalam (Kasharan, 2021) undertook tahlil for the country's prominent football player organized by the National Football Association Brunei Darussalam (Kasharan, 2021). Indeed, digital tahlil during a lockdown allows for families and friends to come together and see each other in the virtual space, further engendering domestic harmony, allowing for its preservation and promotion.

3. Digital Zikir

Making zikir (or selawat) in Islam is a pious act that serves to preserve and protect the progeny by invoking to the Prophet Muhammad (Figure 9). MORA organised a series of "majlis dikir syarafil anam'' for twelve nights in a row, starting from the 1st Rabiulawal and ended on the night of 12th Rabiulawal (Junaidi, 2021), to commemorate the birth month of Prophet Muhammad.

'Abdullah b. Amr b. al-As reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying:

When you hear the Mu'adhdhin, repeat what he says, then invoke a blessing on me, for everyone who invokes a blessing on me will receive ten blessings from Allah; then beg from Allah al-Wasila for me, which is a rank in Paradise fitting for only one of Allah's servants, and I hope that I may be that one. If anyone who asks that I be given the Wasila, he will be assured of my intercession.

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ سَلَمَةَ الْمُرَادِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ وَهْبٍ، عَنْ حَيْوَةَ، وَسَعِيدِ بْنِ أَبِي أَيُّوبَ، وَغَيْرِهِمَا، عَنْ كَعْبِ بْنِ عَلْقَمَةَ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ جُبَيْرٍ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرِو بْنِ الْعَاصِ، أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَقُولُ " إِذَا سَمِعْتُمُ الْمُؤَذِّنَ فَقُولُوا مِثْلَ مَا يَقُولُ ثُمَّ صَلُّوا عَلَىَّ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ صَلَّى عَلَىَّ صَلاَةً صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ بِهَا عَشْرًا ثُمَّ سَلُوا اللَّهَ لِيَ الْوَسِيلَةَ فَإِنَّهَا مَنْزِلَةٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ لاَ تَنْبَغِي إِلاَّ لِعَبْدٍ مِنْ عِبَادِ اللَّهِ وَأَرْجُو أَنْ أَكُونَ أَنَا هُوَ فَمَنْ سَأَلَ لِيَ الْوَسِيلَةَ حَلَّتْ لَهُ الشَّفَاعَةُ " .

Figure 9: Hadith on invoking zikir to the Prophet (Source: Sunnah.com, Sahih Muslim 384 In-book reference: Book 4, Hadith 13)

4.3. Preservation and Promotion of Wealth: Digital Donations

Donation is an act of piety for Muslims, and its importance is stated in the Quran (Figure 10).

يَسْـَٔلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنفِقُونَ قُلْ مَآ أَنفَقْتُم مِّنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ وَٱلْيَتَـٰمَىٰ وَٱلْمَسَـٰكِينِ وَٱبْنِ ٱلسَّبِيلِ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا۟ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ بِهِۦ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١٥﴾

They ask you ˹O Prophet in˺ what ˹way˺ they should donate. Say, "Whatever donations you give are for parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, and ˹needy˺ travellers. Whatever good you do is certainly well known to Allah."

Figure 10: Quran verse on donation (Source: Quran.com, Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 215)

During the pandemic, all forms of donation, whether voluntary (sadaqah) or obligatory (zakat) , moved online. MORA enabled individuals to pay zakat online through launching the eZakat platform prior to the second lockdown (Abu Bakar, 2021). NGOs and Instagrammers also followed suit to enable more people to carry out voluntary donations during the pandemic by creating platforms such as the Projek Kongsi Rezeki (Projek Kongsi Rezeki, 2021). Such platforms allowed individuals to donate via Bank Transfers. In addition to grassroot-led projects, corporations such as BIBD initiated the Community for Brunei project (Community for Brunei, 2020). The Community for Brunei serves as an online marketplace for small Food and Beverage vendors to continue trading during the lockdown.

5. Conclusion

Given the pronounced digitalization on Islamic rituals happening on both state and societal level during the pandemic, it is crucial to note whether these rituals all help to preserve and promote faith. Preservation and promotion of faith is important, given the country's vision in becoming a Zikir nation. A Zikir nation is a nation that enforces Allah's laws with its people possessing good moral values (Saim, 2013). For Brunei to be a "Baldatun Tayyibatun Warabbun Ghafur" - a country that is under the protection of Allah (Tema Hari Kebangsaan, 2021), it also needs to be a nation that makes it conducive to worship Allah. Worshiping Allah is part of preservation and promotion of faith. Preserving and promoting faith makes use of all the rituals mentioned above, as analyzed using the Maqāṣid Collaborative Framework

Table 4: Maqāṣid Collaborative Framework Analysis

Preservation and Promotion of Faith			
Preservation and promotion of life	Preservation and Promotion of Intellect	Preservation and Promotion of Progeny	Preservation and Promotion of Wealth
Covid-19 lockdowns / closure of religious arenas	Digital Dakwah	Digital communal prayers	Digital donation

Given the inevitable isolations due to the Pandemic, it is important that faith preservation and promotion be carried out via digital means. However, issues such as digital divide (Haidi & Hamdan, 2022) and ethics (Anshari et al., 2022) were beyond the scope of this paper. Further research needs to be carried out to determine whether such issues come up when making use of various digital means to preserve and promote faith. Finally, as Brunei aspires to become a Smart Nation as well as a Zikir Nation, it is important that digitalization is not all about the technological "how", but rather how digital society places the teachings of Islam and Islamic spirituality in every aspect of life and creates a conducive environment for the worship of Allah.

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