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## Digitalisation Empowerment in Mosque Tourism Management; A Potential and Current Practice

Nazatul Aqilah Sutrisno<sup>1</sup>, Masrul Hayati Kamarulzaman<sup>2</sup>, Siti Sara Ibrahim<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Kuala Pilah, Malaysia,

<sup>2,3</sup>Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Negeri Sembilan, Kampus Rembau, Malaysia

### Abstract

Through its tourism activities, the tourism industry has previously become the primary contributor to the country's economic growth in terms of culture, environment, and community. In addition to Islamic tourism, Mosques are getting popular due to their unique architecture. Seri Sendayan Mosque, Putra Mosque, Kristal Mosque, and others were built to attract global tourists and contribute to the industry's glory. However, the lack of attraction requires a greater focus on the management and positioning of mosque tourism in Malaysia. Digitalisation is seen as an alternative to improve mosques' positioning strategy and management to be more efficient in the tourism industry. This step is in line with the agenda of Sustainable Development Goals to promote regeneration, preserve cultural heritage, sustain city communities, and strengthen the institution of the mosque as a peaceful place for community gatherings. This strategy is crucial in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring the industry to adhere to specific standard operating procedures (SOP), limiting the physical activities traditionally involved in tourism. Therefore, this study examines and reviews the current digitisation practices used in the operations of mosque tourism in Malaysia. Several mosques benchmark digitalisation practices were observed before reaching a thematic conclusion based on observations and conceptual reading. According to the findings, certain mosques have begun to move their traditional methods of operation to digitalisation, at least through the use of a QR code or my Sejahtera. Furthermore, several have made advancements in digitalisation concerning mosque management and public positioning.

### Introduction

The increasing size of the Muslim population worldwide has led to the rise of the Islamic Tourism industry (Kessler, 2015). Nowadays, globally, mosques have been positioned as one of the main approaches to understanding Islam (Bagby, 2021; Brekke, 2019). Besides, the mosque also encourages Muslims to integrate with the local community (Dana, 2011). In fact, mosques in Malaysia are also seen as one of the attractions for tourists arriving from abroad (Wong, 2021).

According to Sobri and Tonot (2017), the management and administration of mosques in Malaysia are still considered backwards, leading to mismanagement or inefficiency in the tourism sector. The management system causes mosques in Malaysia to fail as a community attraction (Ab Muin et al., 2016). The current mosque management needs and the mosque can fully function for the community. Moreover, community involvement in the mosque is highly impactful, especially in efforts to attract tourists.

Thus, digitalisation is seen as an able element to influence the mosque's management to be more organised. Busulwa et al (2022) explained that digitalisation adaptation could make management and administration more efficient, particularly in information management. Clear statements in information will drive a more sustainable management system. In addition, digitalisation is the alternative to improve the development and positioning of mosques to be more efficient in the tourism industry, in line with SDGs 9, 'Innovation, Industry and Infrastructure.'

Subsequently, this can be seen in the implementation of digitalisation in the tourism industry. Hadjielias et al (2022) examined the role of digitalisation in travel services, such as obtaining information on customer satisfaction levels used by many travel companies today. Feedback and reviews on websites will directly affect the trust of other users (Kitsios et al., 2022). Thus, travel companies can also build their strength and position (Li et al., 2020). The trend of digitalisation in the Islamic tourism industry is not far behind with applications such as Eatmarna implemented in Saudi Arabia for pilgrims and Umrah and My Sejahtera implemented in Malaysia to scan the COVID-19 health certificate,

Therefore, this study reviews the potential of digitalisation toward the efficient management of mosque tourism. The study has also made an observation based on the qualitative method to study digitalisation in a few mosques gazetted as tourist attractions in Malaysia. In a nutshell, this study is significantly essential to future study and practice of the tourism industry in improving and sustaining the position and management of mosques in line with the SDGs agenda with KEGA 15 of Malaysia truly Asia.

## **Literature Review**

### **Mosque Tourism Management & Development**

By tradition, people worldwide will visit the holy land of Mecca for Hajj and pilgrimages every year (Zamani & Henderson, 2010). It is how the term 'Islamic tourism' had started to be recognised globally. The Islamic countries worldwide, such as Morocco, Turkey, Egypt, and Malaysia, have Islamic tourism as one of the most important sources of revenue for economic development (Laderlah, 2015). Mosque has been one of the Muslim's important places of worship. Malaysia is rich with historical values and modern mosques with unique architectural designs (David, 2017) like Masjid Sri Sendaya located at Bandar Sri Sendayan, Negeri Sembilan, Putra Mosque in Putrajaya and Masjid Negara in Kuala Lumpur. These mosques have been promoted as core tourism attractions, and they have been known as mosque tourism (Mansor et al., 2015). In the past, a mosque was used as a place of worship and as a place for educational, political, and community events (Aziz et al., 2016). In Malaysia, three (3) parties are responsible for promoting and implementing activities at tourism mosques throughout the country. These agencies are the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), Islamic NGO and the mosque's management. ITC helps to promote tourism mosques through their

website. They also organise trainings and activities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the mosque's management.

ITC implements various programs to strengthen the management of tourist mosques. Among the programs implemented are the Malaysian Tourist Mosques Convention, Islamic Tourism Workshop (Mosque Management Division) and the National Level Imam Roundtable Conference Tourism Mosque Edition. The programs' priority is to provide exposure to the benefits of mosque tourism to Muslim and non-Muslim tourists and encourage the mosque's management to provide special facilities to tourists. On the other hand, NGOs such as Islamic Outreach ABIM (IOA) had implemented a programme called Mosque Tour Guide (MTG) for ten (10) tourism mosques throughout Malaysia. The mosques are the National Mosque, Sultan Abdul Samad Jamek Mosque Kuala Lumpur, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque and Putra Mosque in Putrajaya, Zahir Mosque in Alor Setar, Kedah, Kampung Kling Mosque and Selat Mosque in Melaka, Muhammadiyah Mosque in Kota Bahru, Kelantan, Panglima Kinta Mosque in Ipoh, Perak and Kota Iskandar Mosque in Johor Bahru, Johor. Lastly, the mosque management has provided a volunteer tour guide and special facilities for tourists by providing clean and comfortable bathrooms, mosque directions in various languages such as Arabic, English and Chinese, and kiosks selling souvenirs, drinks, and snacks. For example, the National Mosque provides dedicated bathrooms and kiosks that sell souvenirs to tourists. Tourist counters or information counters facilitate the delivery of information and published materials. In terms of activities, some mosques take the initiative to implement recreational programs for tourists. The activities must be based on guidelines issued by JAKIM, the "Garis Panduan Pelancongan dan Lawatan ke Masjid" (Umar & Ashaari, 2019).

### **Potential Digital Application in Tourism Industry**

The tourism sector, which is most active in the implementation of digital technologies, has not been left out of digitalisation. The digitalisation of tourism takes various forms of manifestation, which include the online purchase of ready-made tours formed by tour operators, and the development and implementation of mobile applications, including for tourists, digitalisation of Amateur tours through the creation of online schools for novice travellers, virtual tours, QR code, mobile guides and reference books (Natocheeva et al., 2020). Moreover, there is also Islamic mobile application that has been utilised in Malaysia, such as Islamic Tourism Go, Muslim Travel and E-Mosque. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's government has made it compulsory for all facilities, shops, and institutions to utilise the "MySejahtera" application to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks.

### **QR Code**

Mobile phone usage nowadays is crucial, especially when travelling. QR code technology encodes information in black and white dots that have been converted into useful information when scanned under a QR reader. QR codes ARE efficient and helpful in religious trips where the order of actions to be taken is prescribed. In the holy city, Mecca in Saudi Arabia, visitors can scan their phone with the QR code provided by the mosque to read steps in performing the pilgrimage is called "Umrah "or "Hajj". Previously, the traditional way to understand the Umrah or Hajj steps in Mecca was to have a printed brochure or several brochures containing instructions for the visitors and the locations that the visitors may visit during their residence in Mecca. The visitor must search the correct brochure to get the desired information. He may have the chance to get what he wants quickly or cannot get what

he wants from the material he has. QR code technology enabled visitors to quickly read the information regarding Umrah or Hajj easily (Alshattnawi, 2012). In Malaysia, QR codes are also increasingly known to Malaysian citizens. It is being practised in many institutions, including mosques. Tourism Mosque in Malaysia utilised QR code as a medium to convey information to the tourist by scanning the QR code. Tourists can obtain desired information about the mosque's history, management, activities, and programs. Moreover, tourism mosques also use QR codes that consist of information about Islam history, Pillar of Islam, prayer, and other Muslim practices.

### **My Sejahtera**

In the convention of the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, the Malaysian government had taken the initiative to develop a mobile application called MySejahtera. This MySejahtera app is a digital contact tracing, considered an essential tool for public health officials and local communities to fight the spread of novel viruses, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Hanafiah et al., 2020). It is a well-developed device that structurally registers and manages the entry of visitors into a premise within this country, which aims to guarantee public safety in managing the outbreak and the spread of COVID-19. The app also provides its users with important information such as information during the COVID-19 outbreak, such as quarantine period, closed contact and other information such as clinics and hospitals to report the case of COVID-19. All facilities and places around Malaysia are compulsory to have MySejahtera's QR Code in front of their premises entry to be scanned by visitors. These practices included all mosque and prayer rooms throughout this country, especially the tourism mosque usually visited by local and international tourists.

### **E-Mosque**

Currently, there are limited tools and technology relevant for the mosque to be used as a medium for disseminating information related to activities and events to the community. However, one mobile application has been developed. Mosques throughout the country did not widely utilise these mobile apps. This existing application allows tourists to access through mobile phone regarding the information about prayer times, Qiblat direction, and tracking of the nearest mosque to perform prayer. This mobile app is called E-Mosque; it is a mobile application that shows mosque information such as prayer times, activities, programs, Qibla direction, mosque background and other relevant information. This programme uses geovisualisation, such as multimedia cartography, to evaluate geoinformation about mosques. E-mosque app is still new in the Malaysian context. It has become a resource for mosques located in Kuala Lumpur. This app provides the mosque's activities, address, and coordination to help tourists reach the mosque's location in Kuala Lumpur (Mohd Hasmizi et al., 2020).

### **Islamic Tourism Go**

Islamic Tourism Go is a smartphone application developed using location-based Augmented Reality to assist tourists in finding Islamic information, including the nearest mosque or tourism mosque near their current location. There are three (3) main categories in the Islamic Tourism Go: Restaurant, Islamic Interesting Places, and Prayer Places (Abidin et al., 2018). These kinds of information are the most necessary information needed by the tourist (Kourouthanassis et al., 2015). Researchers will add other relevant information regarding Islamic tourism in the future.



### **Muslim Travel**

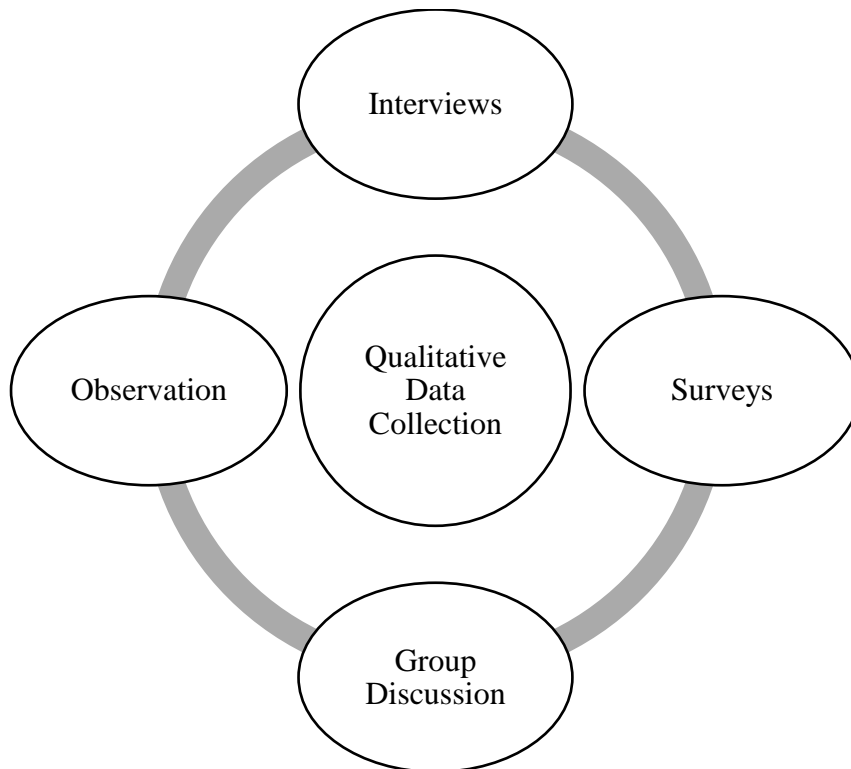
Muslim Travel is a mobile application for Muslim travellers; it has been developed to provide an easy and convenient interface for tourists to obtain information about prayer time and get the notification of prayer time, qiblat direction, and nearest mosque located around their place. Besides that, Muslim Travel also provides various services, such as showing Muslims the Jama' and Qasar prayer zones according to Islamic Shariah, a list of du'a, nearby Halal restaurants, 99 Allah's names, and a Tasbih to count dhikr. According to application developer Ej-Ebiary et al (2019), this application will be integrated in the future to suit all madhabs, and it can be used by all the Muslim tourists around the world.

### **Methodology**

Implementing a systematic management system is essential in improving and sustaining the position and management of mosques in line with the SDGs agenda with KEGA 15 Malaysia being truly Asian. Therefore, this study used the qualitative method to obtain primary data on the implementation of digitisation that has been implemented, especially mosques gazetted as tourist attractions. Meanwhile, the methods used in this study is based on observation.

Observation is one of the foundations of qualitative research (Table 3.1), observation is carried out to increase knowledge of the outside world that will be explored to obtain the basis and process of thought before formulating it into scientific thinking (Cuka et al., 2015). Observation also been a guided to build research sample. There are several basics that need to be emphasized in handling observations in tourist areas especially in obtaining quality data (Cuka et al., 2015) as stated it below;

- a) Observation is necessary to plan
- b) Observation should be focused on the research problem
- c) The observation needs to be documented
- d) Observation is necessary to objectify
- e) The observation must be repeated
- f) Observation should be carried out in several sites.



**Figure 3. 1 Qualitative Data Collection**

This study referred to some guided basics in implementing observation methods on digitalisation empowerment in mosque tourism management. The researcher has made observations on the criteria of mosques to be studied. In the initial observation, the researcher found that more than twenty-five mosques have been gazetted as tourist attractions (Tourism Malaysia Brochure). However, after filtering, the researcher selected only a few mosques after dividing them into three groups of mosques, namely old or new mosques in urban, rural or heritage areas. Then, the details of the available information are entered in the table as illustrated in Table 3.1

Table 3

*1 List of Chosen Mosque and details*

No	Mosque	Address	District (Area)	Criteria
1.	Masjid Melayu	202-210, Jalan Kota, Kampung Jambu, 34000 Taiping, Perak	Perak (Urban)	1.Old Mosque in Perak since 1893. 2.Building Structured; Sumatran, Chinese, Hindu, and the Melaka Malay design. 3.Capacity of mosque are not stated.
2.	Masjid Negara	Jalan Perdana, Tasik Perdana, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	Kuala Lumpur (Urban)	1.New Mosque since 1965 and has been upgraded on 1987. 2.Building Structured; Grand Mosque in Mecca design. 3.Capacity of mosque around 8,000 to 15,000 pax per time.
3.	Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin	25, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Presint 3, 62100 Putrajaya, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya	Putrajaya (Urban)	1.New Mosque or known as Iron Mosque since August 2009. 2.Building Structured; Modern design architecture or wire mesh. 3.Capacity of mosque around 20,000 pax per time.
4.	Putra Mosque	Persiaran Persekutuan, Presint 1, 62502 Putrajaya, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya	Putrajaya (Urban)	1.New Mosque or known as Pink Mosque since 9 March 1999. 2.Building Structured; Arab-Islamic architectural design. 3.Capcity of mosque around 10,000 to 15,000 pax per time.
5.	Kampung Hulu Mosque	Jalan Masjid Kg. Hulu 75200 Melaka City, Melaka.	Malacca (Heritage)	1.Old and unique Mosque in Malaysia since 18 <sup>th</sup> century the year 1728. 2.Building Structured; Javanese and Chinese design. 3.Capacity of mosque are not stated.

**Finding and Discussion**

Based on the set sample data, the researcher used cluster sampling to generate findings in the study "Digitalization Empowerment in Mosque Tourism Management; A Potential and



Current Practice". Among the findings obtained by the researcher in the initial observations were summarised in table 3.2 (refer to Appendix 1).

Firstly, Masjid Melayu is located in the city of Taiping at the address Jalan Kota, Kampung Jambu, 34000 Taiping, Perak. This mosque was built in 1893 and is known as the oldest mosque in Perak with a Sumatran, Chinese, Hindu, and Melaka Malay design. However, the capacity of people who can be placed at one time cannot be determined. This mosque is one of the mosques visited by tourists, and based on observations, the strengthening digitisation implemented in this mosque QR Code for My Sejahtera and pay for donation or known as "Tabung Ilmiah" using the Boost Application.

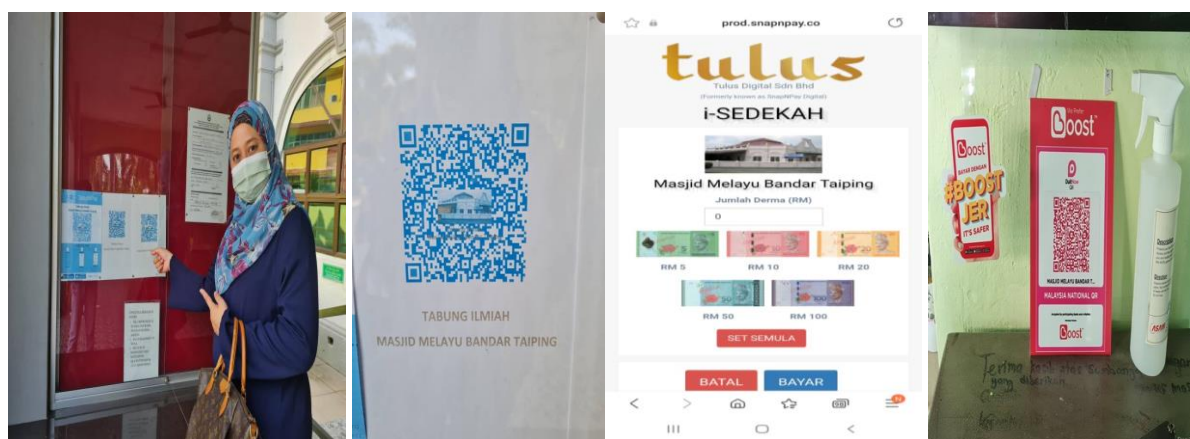


Figure 1: On-site Picture of Observation – Masjid Melayu, Bandar Taiping Perak

Secondly, Masjid Negara which is located at Jalan Perdana, Tasik Perdana, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. The construction of this mosque is based on the Grand Mosque in Mecca design which was built in 1965 and upgraded in 1987. The mosque is located in the centre of the city, accommodating eight to fifteen thousand people at a time. Among the digitalisation implementations in National Mosque Kuala Lumpur are QR Codes and Website Advertisements.

What is interesting about the implementation of the QR Code in this mosque is the collaboration with the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) launched by Dato 'Jailani Johari, aimed to "encourage the public to dispose safely and recycle expired mobile devices. Life, unused or unwanted, towards fostering a 3R (reduce, reuse and recycling) culture in Malaysia " (MCMC, 2015). Meanwhile, advertising through websites such as TripAdvisor made it easier for users or tourists to find and get information through reviews from others.



Figure 2: On-site Picture of Observation – Masjid Negara

Third, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque which known as Iron Mosque is located in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Presint 3, 62100 Putrajaya, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya. This mosque is a new mosque established in August 2009 based on modern design architecture or wire mesh. The capacity of this mosque is 20,000 people per time. This mosque is not close to the Putra Mosque, and the differences in digitalisation implementation can be seen in the Digital Info Board.

Visitors can use the Digital Info Board to view some of the information, such as organisation charts and mosque space. On the digital info board, there are also Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube pages that visitors can view. It is more convenient for visitors who come to this mosque for the first time, especially tourists who are not proficient in foreign languages. At the same time, the QR Code is only used as a scanner, MySejahtera. There is no link to other applications such as advertisements, pages or donations.



Figure 3: On-site Picture of Observation - Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque

Fourth is Putra Mosque which located in Persiaran Persekutuan, Presint 1, 62502 Putrajaya, Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya. The mosque is located in the heart of the development city, close to the Government Office building, Botanical Garden, prime minister's office and others. This mosque is a new mosque built in 1999 known as the Pink Mosque. Structured buildings based on Arab-Islamic architectural design can accommodate up to ten or fifteen thousand people at a time. Various digitisation facilities are used in this mosque, such as QR codes, YouTube applications, and Wi-Fi connections.

In Putra Mosque, the QR Code has the same function as other mosques for My Sejahtera priority, but additions such as direct to YouTube and donation or zakat. It is easier for people at the mosque to review and donate directly to the mosque institution. In addition, with the Wi-Fi facility provided, it will be easier for visitors to go directly to the QR Code page provided. Sometimes, an internet connection is difficult to connect, and this alternative is helpful to visitors or tourists.

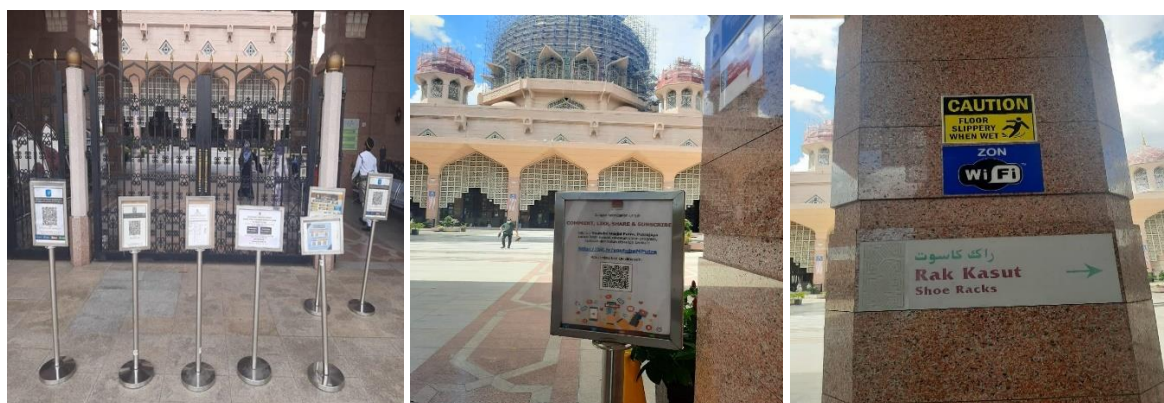


Figure 4: On-site Picture of Observation - Putra Mosque

Fifth is Kampung Hulu Mosque located in Jalan Masjid Kg. Hulu 75200 Melaka City, Melaka. This mosque is a relic mosque under Act 645 (Heritage Land). This mosque is the oldest in Malaysia since the 18th century, 1728, with a Javanese and Chinese design. However, the capacity of this mosque cannot be determined as this mosque is on the heritage land. This mosque cannot be expanded without the permission of the Melaka government. This mosque is also under the Malacca Islamic Religious Department (JAIM) guidance.

However, the Kampung Hulu mosque has implied some digitalisation empowerment such as QR Code, Facebook and Website. Interestingly, the QR Code at the Kampung Hulu Mosque is directly connected to channels of suggestions and complaints implemented under government supervision. In addition, the QR Code is also linked to the mosque's history. The Facebook website is directed to the PPDNKK governance page.



Figure 5: On-site Picture of Observation - Masjid Kampung Kling Melaka

### Conclusion & Recommendation

Islamic tourism is a significant industry with a rich and diverse history, especially in Muslim countries. Throughout history, it has drawn Muslim visitors and many non-Muslim tourists. As a result, mosques are becoming more popular as tourist attractions in the tourism industry.



However, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has changed some traditional mosque management and positioning strategy methods due to several changes in standard operating procedures (SOP) that necessitate digitalisation adaptation. Thus, the study discovered some digitalisation practises in the current operation of mosques in Malaysia, and many of them have set different strategies on it due to different management based on states. Some use a website, while others use social media to promote their mosque to the general public, particularly tourists. Other forms of digitalisation, such as digital boards, are being used by several mosques in Malaysia to illustrate and deliver information to tourists on-site. Otherwise, some mosques in states have used digitalisation in their financial operations, particularly in collecting public funds. Thus, it is confirmed that mosque tourism in Malaysia is currently moving toward digitalisation to continue contributing to the country's economic growth through tourism activities involving the community and the industry. However, further research can be conducted to investigate how the community accepts digitalisation and how it can become valuable resources for mosques to grow in line with the SDGs goal of promoting regeneration, preserving cultural heritage, and sustaining city communities, as well as strengthening the institution of the mosque as a peaceful place for community gathering.

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### Correspondence Author

Siti Sara Ibrahim

Email: saraibrahim@uitm.edu.my

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### Appendix

Mosque Area	Digitalization
Masjid Melayu or Masjid Lama Bandar Taiping (Urban)	QR Code; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My Sejahtera</li> <li>- Pay for donation or known as Tabung Ilmiah</li> <li>- Also can paid by Boost.</li> </ul>
Masjid Negara Kuala Lumpur (Urban)	QR Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My Sejahtera</li> <li>- Mobile e-waste</li> </ul> Website Ads <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tripadvisor</li> </ul>
Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, Putrajaya (Urban)	QR Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My Sejahtera</li> </ul> Digital info board <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube</li> </ul>
Masjid Putra, Putrajaya (Urban)	QR Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My Sejahtera</li> <li>- Youtube (Comment, Like, Share and Subscribe)</li> </ul> Wifi
Masjid Kampung Hulu Melaka (Heritage) Under JAIM	QR Code <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- My Sejahtera</li> <li>- “Saluran Cadangan”</li> </ul> Facebook Website