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Comparative Analysis of Government Website and Service Monitoring System Ratings among State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs) in Malaysia

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Abstract: This study explores the comparison of websites of various State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs) in Malaysia using the Government Website and Service Monitoring System known as SPLaSK ratings. SPLaSK, an initiative by the Malaysian government serves as a critical tool for monitoring and evaluating the performance of government websites and services. By focusing on the SIRCs, this study seeks to identify patterns, strengths, and areas for improvement in digital governance. Using qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews, the study analyzes SPLaSK ratings of SIRCs to understand how these councils utilize digital platforms to engage with the public, disseminate information, and provide services. Websites registered with SPLaSK are assessed based on six (6) dimensions, namely accessibility, ease of use, quality of content, privacy or security, responsiveness, and reliability. It has been disclosed that only 10 out of 14 SIRCs were registered with SPLaSK in 2023, with 40% achieving excellent ratings of above 80%. The overall scores of the websites also suggest that four (4) SIRCs have underperformed, receiving scores below 50, attributed to inefficient website management. The findings offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of SPLaSK in promoting transparency, efficiency, and user-friendliness in government digital services, thus contributing to the broader discourse on digital governance within government agencies in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Digital governance, website performance, monitoring systems, ratings, SIRCs*

1. Introduction

The integration of digital technology into government operations has transformed how governments interact with their citizens. Numerous benefits are attributed to e-government portals, such as fostering greater efficiency, transparency, and accessibility in public service delivery (Saengchaia et al., 2020). Developing an e-government portal that offers up-to-date public services on both web and mobile platforms will encourage the adoption and use of e-government services (Yıldırım & Bostancı, 2021). An important consideration in fostering effective digital disclosure by the government is the concept of website performance. Almaiah and Nasereddin (2020) suggest that website performance, such as functionality, content quality, ease of use, and security, positively influences the performance expectancy of e-government services.

In Malaysia, the Sistem Pemantauan Laman Web dan Servis Kerajaan (SPLaSK), or Government Website and Service Monitoring System, plays a critical role in this digital transformation. Administered by the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU), SPLaSK is designed to monitor and assess the quality of government websites and services, ensuring they adhere to standards across various dimensions, including accessibility, ease of use, content quality, security, responsiveness, and reliability (MAMPU, 2024). These dimensions are particularly relevant in the context of government disclosure practices. Government agencies are expected to provide timely, accurate, and comprehensive information to the public through their digital platforms.

SPLaSK's assessment criteria directly influence the effectiveness of these disclosure practices by evaluating the extent to which government websites are user-friendly, transparent, and capable of delivering essential information securely and reliably (Khalid & Yang, 2024). The history of SPLaSK reflects Malaysia's ongoing commitment to improving digital governance, starting with the Malaysia Government Portals and Website Assessment (MGPWA) in 2005, and evolving into a more sophisticated tool with the introduction of SPLaSK

v2.0 in 2019, which incorporates real-time monitoring and automated compliance checks (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019).

Despite the implementation of SPLaSK, significant disparities persist in the performance of government websites and services, especially among the State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs) in Malaysia. These councils, tasked with managing Islamic affairs in their respective states, rely on digital platforms for public engagement, information dissemination, and service delivery. However, the effectiveness of these platforms varies widely, with some councils achieving high SPLaSK ratings while others lag. This variability not only reflects inconsistencies in digital governance but also highlights deficiencies in the disclosure practices of these agencies.

The uneven performance of SIRCs' websites has implications for public trust and transparency, as inadequate disclosure practices can hinder citizens' access to critical information and services. This is particularly concerning given the role of digital platforms in facilitating government transparency and accountability. Prior research underscores the importance of robust digital governance frameworks in supporting effective disclosure practices, which are essential for fostering public confidence in government operations (Fong & Meng, 2009; Leong & Lee, 2021). Understanding the factors contributing to these disparities, whether they stem from resource limitations, technical challenges, or organizational inefficiencies—is vital for improving the digital governance and disclosure practices of underperforming councils. Without addressing these issues, the broader goals of transparency and effective governance may remain unmet, undermining the progress made in Malaysia's digital government initiatives (Radzi et al., 2021).

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of website performance using SPLaSK ratings among different SIRCs in Malaysia, to identify patterns, strengths, and areas for improvement in their digital governance and disclosure practices. This study employs a qualitative research design, combining content analysis of SPLaSK ratings with semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, to gain a deeper understanding of how these councils utilize digital platforms, the challenges they face, and the impact of these platforms on public engagement and service delivery. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to provide evidence-based insights that can inform policy recommendations and strategic interventions aimed at enhancing the digital governance capabilities and disclosure practices of SIRCs. This research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on digital governance in Malaysia, offering practical solutions to bridge the performance gap among government agencies and improve transparency and accountability (Ramli, 2017; Radzi et al., 2021).

2. Literature Review

E-Government

In an incredibly increasingly digitized world, governments around the world are adopting and embracing information technology (IT) to assist the duties performance of government for its citizens, especially in the provision of information and services. The implementation of IT systems such as e-government represents a shift towards modernizing traditional government processes. To be more reliable, transparent, accountable, and efficient in obtaining government services. The evolution from e-government to digital government reflects a broader global trend of integrating advanced technologies to enhance public sector efficiency and citizen engagement. This evolution is defined as the production and delivery of information and services inside the government and between the government and the public using a range of information and communication technologies (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). In addition, according to Naswir et al. (2019), digital government is a way of digitizing government services to improve service delivery systems efficiently and effectively to maintain relations with the citizens. It leads to the improvement of government functions and services and works to provide comprehensive service delivery that will satisfy the citizens.

E-E-government in Malaysia

From the local perspective, Malaysia launched e-government in 1995, known as eGOV1.0, and since then the e-government has evolved from a website with the only goal of informing people about the services they provide to the utilization of information and communication technologies (ICT) and neighboring scientific and technological domains, towards societal problem solving, resource optimization, and citizen well-being. (eGOV

3.0 (Abdul Rahim et al., 2019). In addition, MAMPU launched SPLaSK v2.0 (System for Public Sector Website and Online Service KPI Assessment). This improved platform utilizes a web crawler to automatically assess website compliance with established criteria in real time. This evolution in website monitoring systems demonstrates MAMPU's ongoing commitment to ensuring government websites are not only user-friendly but also effective in delivering services and supporting the country's digital government goals (MAMPU, 2024). The SPLaSK initiative plays a critical role in enhancing digital governance by promoting efficiency, transparency, and citizen engagement. As Malaysia embraces digital governance, significant efforts are being made to utilize data and advanced analytics for improved decision-making and public service delivery (Khalid & Yang, 2024)

Website Systems and Components

To ensure digital government, especially online services, are delivered accurately, efficiently, cost-effectively, and robustly, there should be appropriate models, tools, and techniques to measure, monitor, and maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of these services (Fong & Meng, 2009). Government website and service monitoring system ratings reveal significant insights into the effectiveness and reliability of these systems across different countries. Key components of government websites include accessibility, ease of use, content quality, privacy/security, responsiveness, and reliability.

Accessibility: Accessibility is vital to government websites, ensuring they are easy to use on a wide range of devices and platforms. Raut and Singh (2024) highlight that government websites must adhere to accessibility standards to ensure usability for all citizens, which includes optimizing for mobile devices and different operating systems. The accessibility of government websites in Malaysia is a significant concern, as highlighted by multiple studies. Research indicates that while there has been progress in the use of e-government platforms, compliance with web accessibility standards remains inadequate. It is therefore essential to ensure greater compliance of the government websites with established web accessibility standards and guidelines (Ahmi & Mohamad, 2016).

Ease of Use: The ease of use of government websites is critical in ensuring effective communication and service delivery to citizens. Research indicates that government websites must be accessible and user-friendly to enhance public engagement. Malaysian government websites significantly influence citizen satisfaction and their intention to utilize e-government services. Research indicates that perceived ease of use is a critical determinant of citizen satisfaction, ranking alongside service quality and content quality as significant predictors of overall satisfaction with e-government portals in Malaysia (Baharon et al., 2017). Improving user-friendly features and ensuring reliable information is vital for improving the overall experience of Malaysian government websites.

Quality of Content: The quality of content is multifaceted and involves more than just delivering accurate information. It encompasses several aspects to ensure that the content not only informs but also engages and effectively meets its intended goals. The quality of content on Malaysian government websites is assessed using various metrics and dimensions, which greatly influence user satisfaction. Key metrics identified include security, performance, content structure, technology, and accessibility, which are essential for effective e-government services (Rakhani et al., 2023).

Privacy Policy: The integration of private policy and security measures in government websites is crucial for enhancing transparency and accountability through digital platforms. Electronic government policies significantly improve public service transparency and accountability by facilitating faster service delivery and increasing citizen engagement, but challenges such as data security and uneven access remain (Wijaya et al., 2024). Further development and adaptation are needed to overcome these challenges and ensure the effectiveness of e-government in promoting transparency and accountability. Thus, a comprehensive approach that prioritizes robust security measures alongside transparent communication is vital for fostering trust and accountability in government operations.

Responsiveness: The responsiveness of government websites is important for enhancing transparency and accountability through digital platforms. Research by effective government responses to citizen inquiries significantly boosts public satisfaction and engagement. For instance, a study by Schmidthuber et al. (2022) indicates that crowdsourcing platforms reveal that citizens are less likely to participate when their requests

are denied without a clear rationale, emphasizing the need for transparent communication from the government to sustain citizen involvement.

Reliability: The reliability of government websites is essential for enhancing transparency and accountability through digital platforms. Reliability emphasizes the consistency and dependability of the services. According to Taufiqurokhman et al. (2024), technology-enabled service processes can streamline time and cost, quick processing time, and prompt responses may contribute to a positive user experience. A good quality public service can provide easier access for citizens to various services without the need to physically visit government offices.

In summary, The literature review reveals a consensus on the importance of the dimensions and criteria used by SPLaSK in evaluating the performance of government websites. These factors are not only critical for enhancing the accessibility, usability, and reliability of digital platforms but also play a significant role in advancing transparency and accountability in the public sector. This study, focusing on the application of SPLaSK in evaluating the State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs), aims to provide a detailed analysis of the current state of digital governance within these councils and identify possible improvement areas.

3. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach, mixing content analysis with semi-structured interviews. The content analysis looks at the SPLaSK ratings for State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs) in six key areas, as outlined by the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU). To support this analysis, interviews with MAMPU IT officers were held to better understand SPLaSK operations and challenges. The questions for the interviews were developed after reviewing studies on digital governance and website performance and discussing them with MAMPU officials. The interviews focus on key issues like usability, content quality, and security of government websites, and how SPLaSK ratings affect public engagement and services. The insights from these interviews will add important context to the study's analysis and suggestions.

Table 1: Dimensions and criteria for SPLaSK assessment

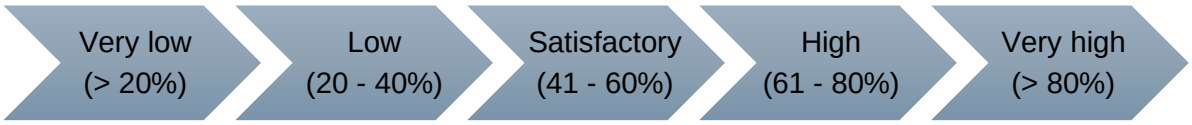
Dimensions	Criteria
Accessibility	Active Link
	Device responsiveness
	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
	Mobile App
	Multi-language Content
	Sitemap
	Find Website using Search Too
Ease of Use	Link to MyGov Portal
	Search Function
	W3C Disability Accessibility
	Advanced Search Option
Quality of content	Publication
	Updated Content
	Number of Online Services
	Electronic Archive
	Publicizing an agency CIO/CDO or equivalent
	Online procurement announcement
	Online E-Participation
Policy/Security	Privacy Policy
	HTTPS Availability
Responsiveness	Feedback form
Reliability	Loading Time
	Downtime

(Source: MAMPU, 2024)

SPLaSK users are assessed based on the grading scale below, with very low for grading less than 20% to very high for more than 80% marks. The diagrammatic flow of the grading scale is depicted in Figure 1. The formula for the grading is based on the below formula:

SPLaSK's grade = [(Accessibility dimensions/7)*100) + ((Ease of use dimension/4) * 100) + ((Quality of Content/9) * 100)) + ((Privacy/Security dimension/2)*100) + (Responsiveness dimension *100) + ((Reliability dimension)/2 * 100)

Figure 1: Grading scale



Source: (MAMPU, 2024)

4. Findings and Discussion

Demographics of the interviewees

For the study, an interview was set up with the MAMPU's IT department discussing their role and duties in handling SPLaSK. Below is the summary of respondents.

Table 2: Profile of MAMPU's Interviewee

Interviewees Codes	Position
R1	Head of Department
R2	Assistant Manager
R3	IT Executive 1
R4	IT Executive 2
R5	IT Officer 1
R6	IT Officer 2

The interview was conducted with the Head of the IT Department of MAMPU together with the Assistant Manager, two (2) IT Executives, and two (2) IT Officers to elicit detailed operation of SPLaSK as a tool to monitor the digital governance of the respective government agency websites.

Compliance Score of SIRCs based on SPLaSK Criteria

As of 31 December 2023, a total of 10 out of 14 SIRCs have registered with MAMPU for the SPLaSK application. A rating on SIRCS for the SPLaSK application has been gathered to compare and interpret the performance of these SIRCs under SPLaSK. For this study, the compliance scores for the whole year of the respective SIRCs have been gathered. The compliance score is generated by the SPLaSK application automatically every month to monitor the performance of the agencies registered for the SPLaSK application. As depicted in Table 3, out of 10 registered SIRCs with SPLaSK, only four (4) or 40% have achieved scores of more than 80% or are considered very high, whereas two (2) SIRCs score within 40 to 80% or are considered as medium to high performance, while four (4) SIRCs underperformed with scores lower than 40%.

An analysis using SPLaSK revealed a clear performance gap among the SIRCs. SR3 topped the rankings with a score of 96.82%, likely due to rigorous state oversight of website management. Conversely, SR8 scored the lowest (23.01%), highlighting challenges faced by some SIRCs. Interestingly, SR9, which began using SPLaSK later (May 2023), achieved better results compared to others who started earlier (January 2023). Interviews suggest that insufficient funding and personnel hinder website management for lower-performing SIRCs, potentially explaining the performance disparity. The high performance of SIRCs, scoring above 90% is credited to the organizational dedication to maintaining their websites efficiently. Specifically, SR3's leading score can

be attributed to the State Council's rigorous oversight of website management across various state agencies. This is consistent with research by Chung (2015). Conversely, interviews suggest that the SIRCs with lower scores (SR2, SR4, SR6, and SR8) struggle with inadequate funding and lack the necessary personnel to effectively manage their websites, reflecting similar challenges highlighted in studies on e-government implementation (Rakhani et al., 2023; Ahmi & Mohamad, 2016).

Table 3: Average score for compliance with SPLaSK by MAMPU (by month) in 2023

SIRCs/ Month	(SR1) *	(SR2)	(SR3)	(SR4)	(SR5)	(SR6)**	(SR7)	(SR8)	(SR9) **	(SR10)
Jan		37.16	99.15	28.69	77.55		39.05	23.22		96.98
Feb		39.12	95.83	27.89	89.37		37.03	22.16		94.19
March		38.92	99.46	26.54	89.26		39.59	23.22		96.21
April		38.06	98.95	28.09	90.84		39.59	23.22		99.22
May		38.83	97.55	27.09	93.37	3.25	39.61	23.29	43.7	97.83
June		35.53	90.18	25.3	90.60	32.61	37.10	21.81	77.89	89.19
July		39.95	95.26	27.38	91.78	35.82	39.68	23.02	93.64	98.85
Aug		41.97	98.08	27.38	95.75	34.04	39.88	16.4	93.32	99.57
Sept		41.5	97.15	32.93	91.63	32.93	41.13	22.93	94.94	99.33
Oct	39.82	4159	97.81	27.78	99.77	33.93	86.16	23.22	98.33	98.85
Nov	94.91	40.79	95.44	27.32	96.98	33.65	84.72	22.94	98.37	96.05
Dec	95.78	42.26	96.97	27.51	93.3	33.26	83.93	30.72	99.46	94.68
Average score	76.84	39.64	96.82	27.83	91.68	29.94	50.62	23.01	87.45	96.74

*Starts using SPLaSK Oct 23
**Starts using SPLaSK on May 23

Interviews conducted with the IT Department revealed:
"*Employee turnover in the agency can be a challenging condition for us. The challenges are that work will be stalled and tasks will change. The solution is to provide training, or often when people change, they will ask to be shown again. Sometimes we will go there, or they will come here*" (R1)

Another respondent elaborated on the challenge in handling SPLaSK, R4 highlighted that,
"The vast array of content management systems (CMS) used by different agencies creates a challenge. Providing specific training for each platform is difficult, and agencies may lack the in-house expertise to implement tagging, a crucial SPLaSK functionality, across all these diverse CMS systems. Furthermore, technical limitations can arise when agencies lack the skills to fix errors identified by SPLaSK. Finally, SPLaSK itself can be blocked by agency servers or the Public Sector Data Center (PDSA), hindering its ability to effectively crawl and monitor websites"
The above view aligns with findings by Fisdian et al. (2024), which emphasize the impact of technical and resource limitations on the reliability and effectiveness of e-government services.

For details on compliance score, a further investigation of the six (6) dimensions of the SPLaSK's criteria was conducted as depicted in Table 4. In line with Table 3 earlier, it justifies that SR3, SR5, SR9, and SR10 have managed to secure scores above 80% predominantly due to their commitment to excel in all dimensions outlined by MAMPU. This shows their commitment to fulfilling the SPLaSK requirement as an effort to promote better websites in the form of user-friendliness, information disclosure, and service efficiency. On the other hand, the four (4) SIRCs with lower scores, namely SR2, SR4, SR6, and SR7, with scores less than 40%, have also obtained lower scores for each dimension, reflecting their poor overall performance in fulfilling the SPLaSK criteria.

An analysis of Table 4 shows that all eight criteria under the 'Accessibility' dimension for device responsiveness, all criteria under 'Ease of Use' for linking to the MyGov Portal, all criteria under 'Quality of Content' for updated content, and all criteria under 'Privacy or Security' for HTTPS availability are met by 100% of the SIRCs (State Internal Revenue Commissions). Notably, 'reliability'' is the only dimension where all SIRCs achieved perfect compliance across all criteria. Conversely, compliance is lowest for 'Accessibility' in terms of

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Mobile Apps, with only 5 out of 10 SIRCs meeting those criteria. The remaining dimensions typically have a compliance rate between 60% and 70% for SIRCs.

Table 4 also overleaf reveals that only four SIRCs namely SR3, SR5, SR9, and SR10 met all the criteria outlined in the SPLaSK dimensions. Conversely, SR8 achieved the lowest score (34.78%), fulfilling only 8 out of 23 criteria sets.

Table 4: SIRCs Compliance to SPLaSK requirement in 2023 (average days or minutes/second compliance in a month)

Dimension	Criteria	SR1	SR2	SR3	SR4	SR5	SR6	SR7	SR8	SR9	SR10	Compliance (dimension)
Accessibility	Active Links	24.33	0	26.17	6.5	28.5	9.75	3.58	0	26.38	24.42	80%
	Device Responsiveness	24.33	28.42	29.42	29.08	29.33	25.63	29.58	29.25	29.38	29.92	100%
	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	24.33	0	29.67	0	29.33	0	0	0	12.63	29.5	50%
	Mobile Apps	0	0	29.42	0	15.17	0	7.58	0	11.63	29.58	50%
	Multi-Language for Content	24.33	0	29.75	0	28.83	0	7.75	0	26.5	29.83	60%
	Sitemap	24.33	0	29.50	0	29.5	0	0	0	26.75	30	60%
	Find Website Using Search Tools	12.67	0	30.17	2.08	30.17	26	0	0	29.63	30.08	70%
Ease of Use	Link to MyGov Portal	24.33	28.17	29.83	2.5	29.42	25.25	29.42	29	28.63	29.75	100%
	Search Function	24.33	28.58	30.00	0	29.25	0	21.75	0	29.25	29.5	70%
	W3C Disability Accessibility	24.33	27.92	29.92	0	29.25	0	29.33	0	29.5	29.42	70%
	Advanced Search Option	24.33	0	29.58	0	28.17	0	7.75	0	26.75	29.83	60%
Quality of Content	Publication	24.33	0	29.33	0	7.17	0	0	0	21.63	29.75	60%
	Updated content	30.33	29.67	27.08	0.17	28.5	0.5	8.08	0.75	23.88	22.67	100%
	Number of Online Services	24.33	0	29.83	0	28.83	0	7.75	0	26.88	29.75	70%
	Electronic Archive	24.33	0	29.5	0	28.92	0	7.75	0	26.38	29.75	70%
	Publishing an Agency or Equivalent	20.00	0	27.42	0	28.08	0	7.67	0	23.5	24.92	60%
	Online Procurement Announcement	24.33	0	29.58	0	28.92	0	7.75	0	26.75	30.08	60%
	Online E-participation	24.33	0	29.75	0	29.67	0	7.75	0	26.63	29.42	60%
Privacy/Security	Privacy Policy	24.33	0	29.58	0	28.08	0	775	0	26.5	29.25	60%
	HTTPS Availability	34.67	29.42	29.83	29	30.08	26	29.58	2.42	23.13	29.75	100%
Responsiveness	Feedback form	24.33	0	29.67	0	28.17	0	7.75	0	26.88	29.5	60%
Reliability	Downtime (days)	23.33	27.00	29.67	27.83	29.42	25	28.58	27.92	28.75	29.42	100%
	Downtime (minutes)	0.61	2.61	0.75	0.64	0.97	1.05	0.70	1.85	0.82	1.4	100%
	Loading time (days)	23.67	27.33	29.08	28.17	29.97	25.13	28.83	28.92	29.25	29.58	100%
	Loading time (seconds)	1.39	1.57	1.34	0.45	0.12	2.58	0.69	1.72	1.36	0.61	100%
Compliance to dimensions (x%, xx/23)		95.6% (22/23)	43.48% (10/23)	100% (23/23)	43.48% (10/23)	100% (23/23)	43.48% (10/23)	82.6% (19/23)	34.78% (8/23)	100% (23/23)	100% (23/23)	

Table 5 below (based on the MAMPU SPLaSK grading scale) summarizes the distribution of scores among the SIRCs. There is a positive trend for SIRCs that have registered for SPLaSK. Even though only 10 out of 13 SIRCs registered with SPLaSK (76.9%), the majority (60%) scored in the 'very high' category (over 80%).

Table 5: Distribution of Scores among SIRCs based on the SPLaSK Grading Scale

Grading	Number of SIRCs	Percentage (%)
Very low (< 20%)	Nil	Nil
Low (20 – 40%)	1	10
Satisfactory (41 – 60%)	3	30
High (61 – 80%)	Nil	Nil

Very high (>80%)	6	60
Total	10	100

The SPLaSK assessment revealed a significant disparity in website quality among SIRCs. While some, like SR3, achieved near-perfect scores due to strong organizational commitment, others, like SR8, struggled. Interestingly, even later adopters like SR9 showed promising results. These findings suggest that resource allocation and dedicated personnel are important for effective website management under SPLaSK.

5. Conclusion

The SPLaSK assessment serves as a strong indicator of the effectiveness of this framework in enhancing digital governance among Malaysian State Islamic Religious Councils (SIRCs). The significant performance disparity highlights areas for improvement, particularly for SIRCs struggling with resource allocation. Investing in well-trained personnel and sufficient funding can significantly elevate website quality and user experience. Implementing SPLaSK empowers SIRCs to deliver vital services more efficiently, strengthening digital governance. However, continuous monitoring and adaptation to evolving technological advancements remain crucial to ensuring the long-term effectiveness of SPLaSK.

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