

**Research article**

# Digital Services and Social Stability: Evaluating The Impact from a Maqasidic Approach

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**Abstract.**

During the Covid-19 epidemic, there was an urgent need for many countries to move as quickly as possible towards digital services such as e-government, e-learning and e-commerce. The positive aspects of this transformation cannot be overlooked, however, other negative effects may result from the long and medium-term of such an approach. For instance, not all governments have the ability to provide Internet access to serve the interests of their citizens. Therefore, this research will question the effects of the increasing trend towards digital services and how can they affect societal stability? Furthermore, how can these effects be dealt with from a Maqasidic perspective? To answer these questions, the researchers used the holistic approach to collect information on the subject matter and related concepts, terms and opinions related to digital services and social stability. Also, the analytical approach showed the effects of digital services on social stability with a specific focus on Maqasid Shariah. Among the most important results of the research are that: quality of information accessibility, equality, social trust, social cohesion and community engagement are the main aspects that can be affected by digital services. Therefore, moving towards digital services must be directed by Maqasid al-Shariah as a frame to maintain social stability and peace.

**Keywords:** Digital services; social stability; Maqasid al-Shariah; e-government; e-learning

## 1. Introduction

According to the United Nations, digital services have spread over half of the world's population in the past two decades, transforming how people interact with each other and society. As a result, connectivity, financial inclusion, trade access, and access to health care can all be improved with the use of technology.(1) For instance, Artificial Intelligence (AI) - enabled technologies in the healthcare field are helping save lives, identify disease, and extend life expectancy. For children who would otherwise be unable to attend school, virtual classrooms and distance learning have allowed them to seek

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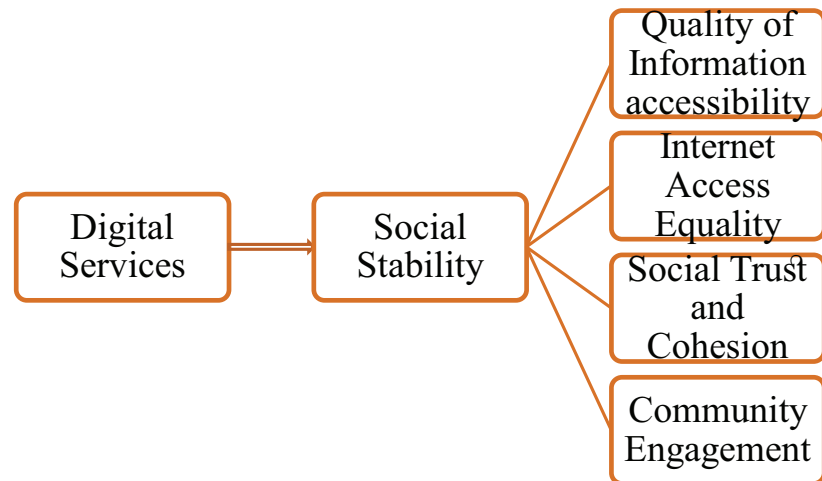
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knowledge and fulfil their dreams of being educated. Public services are becoming more available and accountable and less bureaucratic due to blockchain-powered platforms and artificial intelligence. Policymakers and programmers can also benefit from using big data to develop more flexible and efficient policies and programmes.(1) However, the individuals who are yet to be connected to the new technologies are missing out on many advantages of this new era and are far behind. Some of these groups include women with disabilities, ethnic or cultural minorities, indigenous peoples, and people from poor or isolated locations. Therefore, digital services may have a negative impact on social stability, especially during COVID-19, by affecting different variables like social trust, cohesion, information equal access and community engagement, among other features. Moreover, although digital services are an important tool for realising human needs during the pandemic, it can pose challenges to the exercise of other necessities that governments must address. Thus, any legislation or public policy ensuring digital services must include procedures to protect the information accessibility, rights to privacy, equality and non-discrimination, among other things. Therefore, this article discusses the effects of digital services on social stability by focusing on specific features and provides an Islamic perspective to solve such issues and problems.

## 2. Concepts and Methodology

The term "social stability" refers to the range of life structure and a regular routine that protects against future situational dangers and helps preserve links with social resources and social conditioning.(2) Consistent social conditions, such as housing, employment, social ties, sufficient money, and the absence of discrimination are typically used to measure the concept. However, social stability indicators now in use emphasise an independent or additive relationship among variables, for instance, the relationship between capital development and unemployment, GDP and social trust, which may not ultimately reflect the actual structure of these variables in disadvantaged areas. While previous studies have attempted to answer several questions concerning this matter, there is still a lot to be improved.(2) On the other hand, Digital Services are services delivered via the internet or an electronic network, whose nature makes their delivery essentially automated with minimal human intervention and impossible to ensure without the use of information technology. The concept of "digital services" refers to the electronic data collection and processing, distribution of information, and knowledge dissemination across various platforms and devices, such as the web and mobile applications. The information is presented in an easily-understandable style and

generally includes transactional services like filing forms for verification and claiming benefits.(3) The following figure (1) introduces the major issues discussed in this article, including quality of information accessibility, internet access equality, social trust and cohesion, and community engagement.



**Figure 1:** Digital Services and Social Stability Major Issues.

After presenting the above issues, the researchers will discuss the possible based on the Islamic view, providing useful insights to the article. The holistic method has been used to introduce and discuss different concepts and issues related to the topic. Meanwhile, the analytical approach has also been integrated into this study to collaborate on a Maqasidic perspective in the discussion and provide recommendations.

### 3. Results

This section explains how the quality of information accessibility, internet access equality, social trust and cohesion, and community engagement have been affected by digital services before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 3.1. Information Accessibility

During the pandemic, millions of workplaces have been forced to shift to remote practices made accessible by Internet access, highlighting the importance of connection for some people's working and professional lives. However, working remotely has introduced important obstacles such as scheduling and tight working relationships and highlights underlying gaps in access to career opportunities, emphasising the exclusion

of people who cannot telecommute. For example, in Africa and Latin America, more than 51 per cent of working people are affected by the labour informality that existed before the pandemic.(4) Technology has become an important tool for children and teenagers' growth and performance in obtaining formal and non-formal education benefits. However, although using technology to solve school closures has become a method, the lack of digital devices highlights the limitations of that approach. For example, not all students or teachers have access to digital hardware, a reliable internet, radio, or television connection, or the knowledge and working conditions necessary to use and benefit from existing digital platforms.(5) Many government initiatives have developed after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic to benefit from using information technology during the pandemic crisis. For example, personal and health data are being collected via mobile applications to conduct epidemic control and monitor the virus's spread. However, some features of these apps potentially infringe on personal privacy, requiring governmental authorities to guarantee that any technology tool developed meets the requirements of legality, need, and proportionality before it can be implemented.(5) Data-sharing systems can now be implemented around the world because of the availability of information and communication technology. However, access to timely and effective care is currently limited by the lack of harmonisation between different systems. Developing information platforms in all regions to overcome this challenge is still not enough and effective for users. Many extraordinarily valuable data for users' exploration and interactions to the pandemic are inaccessible, accessible, interoperable, and reusable. Based on 103 UN Member States, it was discovered that 54 per cent of UN Member States provided mobile health services to their population in 2020. Similarly, 54 per cent of countries published public information via mobile update subscriptions, apps, or SMS in the areas of education and employment. However, the percentage of sharing in social protection and justice was less than 50 per cent, 47 and 41 accordingly.(6)(7)

TABLE 1: Percentage of Offering Mobile Apps or SMS for Public Information Updates from 2016 to 2020, By Sector (in 103 Countries) (7).

Years	Education	Employment	Health	Environment	Social Protection	Justice
2016	30%	25%	34%	24%	23%	–
2018	46%	38%	36%	36%	33%	–
2020	54%	54%	54%	52%	47%	41%

### 3.2. Internet Access Equality

There are gaps in Internet access based on socio-economic characteristics, and disadvantaged populations bear the brunt of internet usage. Limited economic capacity leads to more digital isolation, therefore, income level is a key obstacle. Furthermore, even when there is Internet access, the devices commonly utilised in vulnerable conditions are often of poor quality, and there are often relatively few units compared to the number of people in a given community. In some states in Africa table (1), more than 95% of the population has no Internet access. Eritrea, Chad, Burundi and Congo have very low rates of internet disconnection globally with less than 10%, followed by Togo and Angola with less than 15%. Concerning Asia, Bangladesh, India, and Nepal have less than 25% of internet access on the other continent. It means that more than 75% of the population is digitally disconnected. Table (1) shows Internet Access Percentage per Population Prior Pandemic (2017-2019).(8)

Country	Most Recent Year	Most Recent Value
Angola	2017	14
Bangladesh	2019	13
Burundi	2017	3
Chad	2017	6
Congo, Rep.	2017	9
Eritrea	2017	1
India	2018	20
Nepal	2017	21
Togo	2017	12

Figure 2: Internet Access Percentage per Population Prior to Pandemic (2017-2019)(6).

Comparing internet usage between developed and underdeveloped countries shows a big gap among societies. For instance, table (2) indicates that countries like Kuwait, Norway, Denmark, and Saudi Arabia almost have 100% internet access. Canada, Finland, Germany and Japan are also top countries with nearly 90%, followed by the United States, 88%. Infrastructure deployment has favoured metropolitan areas, significantly hurting the rights and benefits of the Internet in rural areas and, in particular, damaging the rural and indigenous communities. Most countries concentrate more on cities and less on rural areas, where there are usually many farmers and poor communities. For

every 100 individuals, there are nearly five times more mobile wideband subscribers than fixed wideband subscribers, suggesting that mobile connections provide more availability and accessibility. According to the most recent statistics, fixed broadband usage in Latin America and the Caribbean is 10%, while mobile broadband usage is 30%.

Country	Most Recent Year	Most Recent Value
Canada	2017	93
Denmark	2019	96
Finland	2019	90
Germany	2019	88
Japan	2018	91
Kuwait	2019	100
Norway	2019	98
Saudi Arabia	2019	96
United States	2018	88

Figure 3: Internet Access Percentage per Population Prior Pandemic in Developed Countries.(8).

### 3.3. Social Trust and Cohesion

The successful functioning of communities, specifically diverse ones, depends on social trust and cohesion. The lack of social trust and cohesion can cause conflict and dispute between different social groups, increase the risk of violence, and reduce public trust in the government. In the context of trust, "trust in people" refers to a belief in the honesty, integrity, and reliability of others. It may seem a simple concept and an easy notion to explain. However, it was not always simple to figure out who or what people trusted in the past.(9) Social trust encompasses more than "interpersonal trust," which refers to trust between individuals.(10) The term "society" refers to more than just people; it also refers to the structure, institutions, and organisations that form it. As a result, trust exists in society between individuals (interpersonal trust) and institutions and organisations (such as government, law enforcement, business, and labour unions). On the other hand, Social cohesion is a term that refers to the degree to which groups in society are connected and supportive of each other. It differentiates two principal aspects: a community's sense of belonging and the relationships among its members. It

results from an attempt to establish social balance, a sustainable economy, and national identity to establish an equitable system, sustain the urges of unmanaged growth in the economy, and avoid social fractures.(11) Following public health rules is critical to saving lives in the event of a coronavirus outbreak. While there are no Pharma treatments, digital services appear to be one of the most promising strategies for promoting social distancing to reduce COVID-19 infection rates and keep healthcare systems running smoothly.(12) However, an increasing number of individuals have resorted to the streets to show their displeasure with the lockdown rules in place, mainly through digital platforms, especially in Europe (France, Spain, and Italy).(12)(13) As a result, the digital tools themselves have become a means of breaking down social barriers. If the number of demonstrators grows, it could threaten the efforts to reduce the virus's spread.(14)(15)

Furthermore, because people with high social trust are frequently well-connected and integrated into their social networks,(16) enforcing digital platforms and social distancing measures would impact their daily lives than people with low social trust. One could suggest that socially trusted people will continue to associate with others only when they have little confidence in their government, especially its social distancing policies.(17) Also, suppose individuals have no capacity to use digital services and have been isolated for two years because of the coronavirus. In that case, it will be difficult for them to rejoin and integrate with society.(14) On the other hand, the concept of social cohesion is a complex and controversial one. According to analysts, it has both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The horizontal dimension represents individuals in a society's relationships and interactions across differences like identity or other social conceptions like race, gender, religion, or class. Vertical cohesion is defined as the mutual trust that exists between a government and its citizens. This comprises confidence in political, economic, and social leaders, institutions, and processes like voting, rights protection, taxes and public service delivery. The political, economic, social, and security implications of social cohesion are all widely acknowledged. Over the years, a variety of difficulties have harmed social cohesion in a number of countries. For example, the pandemic occurred at a time when public faith in governments was weak, the economy was damaged by lower revenue income, protests were common across the countries, and violent extremist groups acts were on the rise. Therefore, moving to digital services during COVID-19 has worsened long-standing and sometimes deep-seated political, economic, social, and security issues. Moreover, the impact of digital services on social cohesion adds to the numerous other stresses that are affecting communities. For instance, when it comes to this issue, people in some regions do not trust their governments even in daily life face-to-face practices. However, it became

worse when the governments in different countries tried to move to digital services, as people could not trust their government.

### **Community Engagement**

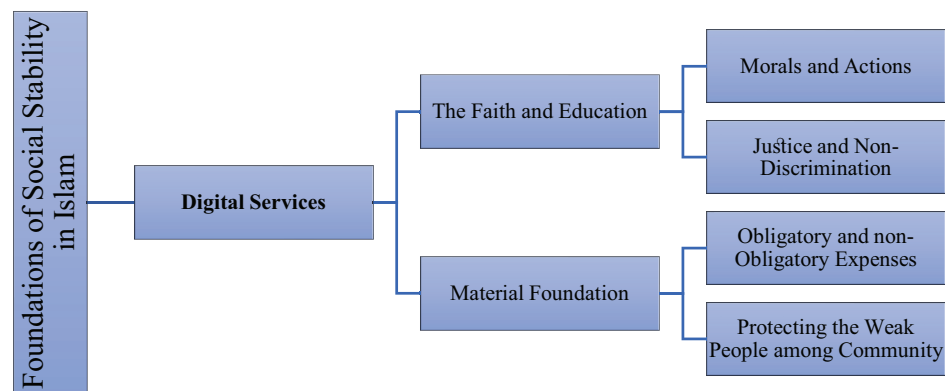
Community engagement is an integrated approach with the particular objective of determining and addressing issues compromising the well-being of specific groups of people related by geography, special interest, or connection.(12) An important aspect of community engagement is the fact that people come together to discuss and make decisions about their community's future. When local governments or community groups have an upcoming action or key step, the word "community engagement" is frequently used to refer to a specific procedure assisted by them. They might employ community engagement procedures to determine how to fill empty spaces in the area, respond to planned development, or create a response to public health or environmental concerns, for example. Community participation can be face to face or online, and it can be a one-time or continuous event.(18) Some of the most underserved demographic groups when it comes to digital services are the elderly, those returning to public life after confinement or prison, migrant workers, the homeless, those with physical or mental disabilities, those with low incomes, and those who work multiple jobs or irregular hours. This may include people who have had to take on additional work or schooling responsibilities to support their families and those who have lost their jobs, become vulnerable to food insecurity or become houseless because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it is important to consider the new changing situations community members face before starting an engagement. However, considering digital services without taking care of all the above categories can be seen as a sign of discrimination against society. Moreover, it may increase instability as individuals feel more isolated and far from realising their fundamental rights and life commodities.

## **3.4. Discussion**

In Islam, the foundations and pillars upon which community members' relationships are divided into two major aspects: the first can be called the faith and education foundation because Islam urges its followers to observe all morals and actions that strengthen the trust and cohesion of the faithful brotherhood. Islam also consolidates values of social justice and preserves people's rights, especially the weak ones. Nonetheless, Shariah fights against all forms of discrimination and inequality, affirming the meanings of altruism and loving good for others as one loves oneself. Furthermore, it encourages cooperation to do good in general. The second aspect is the material foundation, which



controls material and financial matters to protect all rights. For everyone who suffers within society, the material foundation must be a tool to help and provide solutions. A long time ago, in Islam, Allah almighty legislated Zakat, Waqf, and inheritance, and scholars had stressed the importance and role of endowment, funds, and obligatory expenses in engaging and integrating society.



**Figure 4:** Foundation of Social Stability in Islam (Toward Digital Services).

Maqasid al-Shari’ah, or Islam’s higher purposes, indicates “well-being,” implying that whatever action is taken or whatever is achieved should be in the highest interests of all people, including human welfare.<sup>(19)</sup> Based on such fundamentals, one could argue that an effective society requires social stability to conduct its activities according to maqasid principles, emphasising stability dimensions by essentialising and adopting sustainable practices within society while adhering to Islamic ethics and morality requirements. Muslim scholars believe that the Holy Qur’an and Sunnah contain many texts as an indicator of social stability and healthy relationships based on ethics and moralities. Also, compassion and cooperation for good and righteousness are too common to be counted in Shariah, including what generally urges stability in society and those of specific member groups of society, like the elderly, poor, and those with special needs. Therefore, according to Islamic Shariah, social stability became a Maqсад to ensure a healthy society where individuals can enjoy the highest interests and well-being. The Almighty Allah said: “And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty” . <sup>(20)</sup> Almighty also said, “and do good—that you may succeed”.<sup>(20)</sup> Concerning the implementation of these texts in the context of digital services with all their complexities, governments and communities must emphasise cooperation and solidarity, taking the nature of institutional actions in order to ensure internet quality, information accessibility

and the values of one community body should be established in society, through the consideration of all groups in society (no one left behind) and through guidance, speech and other well-known recreational means. Moreover, governments can move to digital services without compromising community engagement by promoting people's interactions through all means and sorts. On the other hand, education, life commodities and health care are crucial for protecting life. Therefore, moving toward e-learning, e-commerce and e-government must consider this Maqсад. Otherwise, decisions on digital services will be made against the needs of individuals that may turn into social instability when those individuals decide to turn against their societies, which they did not care about. In compromising fake news and rumours about COVID-19, governments need to reach people and make information accessible, using other means and institutions, like mosques and local authorities, to communicate with citizens effectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through the use of technology, especially digital services, effectively and peacefully, our world can be more equitable, peaceful and just. For example, e-learning, e-commerce, and e-governance can help people achieve their goals in all aspects of their lives, including fighting against disease, improving health, and making life more comfortable. However, on the other hand, if digital services are not used properly and ethical, it can seriously compromise social stability and security, aggravate inequality and discrimination, and reduce human connection and interaction. When it comes to how we use and manage digital services, Islam has a response. From a Maqasidic perspective, the faith and education foundation and the material foundation must be combined in any process to promote digital services. Islam's morality, good actions, and non-discrimination nature can guide individuals, communities, and authorities in achieving any digital strategy. Moreover, the material foundation was well discussed in Islamic heritage that can serve as a platform instead of developing policies and regulations.

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