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Digital Literacy: The New Survival Skill for Malaysians

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In today's interconnected world, digital literacy is no longer a luxury but it's a necessity. Much like reading and writing, digital literacy is the ability to navigate, evaluate, and create content using digital technology to full participation in modern society. Digital literacy isn't just about knowing how to use a smartphone or post on social media, it's about possessing a set of core skills that empower individuals to learn, work, and engage safely and effectively online. It more like technical competence such as operating devices or using apps to encompass the critical evaluation of information, ethical communication, and proactive self-protection in digital spaces.

Yet, being surrounded by technology does not automatically make us skilled at using it wisely or effectively. In Malaysia, where nearly 97% of households have internet access (DOSM, 2024), digital literacy has become just as essential as reading and writing. This is where digital literacy becomes crucial. Digital literacy is more than knowing how to scroll through TikTok or send an email, it is the ability to find reliable information, evaluate its truthfulness, use digital tools to solve problems, and communicate safely online.

In fast-evolving digital economy, almost every industry from banking to agriculture now relies on digital tools for daily operations.

Figure 1: It's crucial to master digital literacy and cybersecurity skills to succeed nowadays.

Farmers are using Internet of Things (IoT) solutions to monitor crop health and weather conditions, while SMEs are leveraging e-commerce platforms like Shopee and Lazada to reach customers nationwide. Even more Malaysians have Internet access and use computers, but most employers now expect workers to know how to collaborate using cloud platforms, interpret data, and even understand basic cybersecurity practices. According to the MyDIGITAL Blueprint forecast that Malaysia's digital economy will creating nearly 500,000 new jobs in high-tech areas such as AI, cybersecurity, and digital marketing. Malaysia need to heavily investing in digital talent and if we not prioritise digital literacy training, we risk a "digital divide" in the workforce where some Malaysians are equipped for the future while others remain stuck in outdated roles. Digital literacy also gives impacts to entrepreneurship and innovation. Platforms like Grab and Foodpanda, allows thousands to earn income flexibly. But this gig workers need to have strong digital skills to manage profiles, respond to customers, and handle e-payments securely. A digitally literate

workforce attracts foreign investors, enhances national productivity, and positions Malaysia as a competitive player in the global economy.

Today, most government services are moving online, from renewing road tax to paying utility bills. A digitally literate citizen can check government portals, apply for subsidies, or participate in online consultations about public policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the MySejahtera app was central for contact tracing and vaccine registration. While it streamlined processes for millions, many older and rural citizens struggled to download the app, register, or scan QR codes leaving them frustrated and dependent on others. Expanding access is important, but so is training. Pusat Ekonomi Digital Keluarga Malaysia (PEDi) centres provide free internet and digital training to rural communities, helping parents, farmers, and small business owners learn how to use e-services. When everyone can engage digitally, society becomes more inclusive and resilient.

The internet is not just a place for entertainment, it is also full of misleading or harmful information. Malaysians regularly receive unverified messages on WhatsApp about politics, fake health miracle cures, or fake job offers. Forwarding such messages without verification can cause unnecessary panic or even financial loss. Digital literacy can overcome that. It equips citizens with the ability to fact-check using trusted sources, understand how algorithms effect what they see online, and think twice before sharing. Hence, Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) reported removing over 40,000 harmful online posts in 2024 alone, ranging from scams to disinformation. Teaching digital literacy from a young age helps build a generation of critical thinkers who can distinguish facts from falsehoods. This is crucial to help users identify potentially misleading, manipulative or inaccurate content, in line with efforts to reduce the risk of misinformation or harmful content spreading online.

Equipping the next generation with digital literacy is about more than teaching them to use computers. it is about preparing them to thrive in a future shaped by technology.

Figure 2: Digital Literacy can enhance student learning and prepare them for success in the 21st century.

Children entering school today will graduate into a workforce dominated by automation, artificial intelligence, and jobs that do not yet exist. Therefore, digital literacy must be embedded in education as early as possible and not treated as an optional skill. However, digital literacy education must go beyond basic skills such

as coding, digital content creation, cybersecurity awareness, and responsible online communication. These skills not only prepare them for existing jobs but also equip them for future careers in artificial intelligence, robotics, and data science. Collaboration between schools, parents, and industry is also essential. Tech companies can offer mentorship, hackathons, and internship opportunities, giving students hands-on experience. When students see how digital skills apply to real-world problems they are more motivated to learn and innovate.

To conclude, digital literacy is no longer just a skill. It is the passport to participate fully in today's world. It determines who gets the best jobs, who can access government services with ease, and who can separate facts from fake news in online environment. The future belongs to nations that are digitally ready. By making digital literacy a national priority, the responsible parties need to focus on expanding internet access, training teachers, empowering rural communities, and educating citizens about online safety to ensure that no one is left behind.

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