

## **Make technology senior-friendly**

In 2020, the **Department of Statistics** estimated that close to 11 per cent of the population, or 3.5 million people, were above the age of 65. By 2030, 15 per cent would be over 65.

The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission also carried out a survey on Internet usage and found that 11 per cent of Malaysians were not Internet users. Half were senior adults.

According to the US Pew Research Centre (2021), the older the person, the less likely he or she is to embrace the Internet, social media or mobile telephony. However, those who have, use them a lot and learn new skills that enrich their lives. Indeed, seniors are the fastest growing online demographic, though some remain holdouts. In many cases, the real barrier to adoption is not technological, but personal.

Many have privacy and data-security concerns. Some fear that they would be scammed. The United States Senate Committee on Ageing found that fraud against seniors amounted to US\$38 million in 2020. It is such concerns that prevent some seniors from using social media.

In encouraging them to be tech savvy, we must congratulate our government for setting up some 140 senior-citizen centres nationwide. It is moving aggressively to expand the digital service to senior citizens in all parliamentary constituencies in line with the Keluarga Malaysia concept.

To enhance the usability and adoption of technology among senior citizens, here are five strategies:

FIRST, tech companies should keep the tools or apps simple and intuitive by providing easy-to-follow instructions and fewer, well-marked buttons. One must be mindful that seniors are not digital natives. So, not many would find themselves on the other side of the digital divide;

SECOND, technology providers should enhance accessibility features in devices, such as larger text size, bold fonts and speech-activated tools. They should provide instructions that avoid jargon and offer easy access to customer support on how to use a device or platform.

Seniors should be guided by step-by-step prompts and confirmation of completion. Additionally, seniors should have the advantage of push notifications and alerts in the system to encourage engagement and help them navigate the technology.

It is important that the authorities address issues of security and privacy, which are top concerns of seniors;

THIRD, although ease of use is an important factor influencing adoption, technology solutions should be affordable. Senior citizens are particularly price-sensitive when it comes to adopting technology;

FOURTH, seniors would be able to become more tech-savvy through greater education and training. Training programmes such as the government-initiated senior technology workshops, U3A (University of the Third Age) and other similar training projects would help to introduce them to digital skills and literacy.

They should be educated on how technology will benefit them; for instance, that it will improve their health and well-being, help them be more informed, or keep them connected with friends and loved ones. Additionally, seniors should be educated on the risks of online transactions and how they could protect themselves from online scams and misinformation; and,

FIFTH, how a digital tool is constructed can impact its usability for older adults, thereby impacting engagement. Hence, technology should be designed to meet a senior citizen's need in order to be perceived as useful.

Various changes associated with ageing require user interfaces that recognise the needs of older users and do not require them to perform actions outside the scope of their physical or cognitive capabilities.

As older adults often struggle with keyboard entry, especially on smartphones, it should consider tools that reduce the burden of data entry, such as wearable monitoring devices, which can automatically transfer data to the appropriate destination.

Health professionals can use the sentinel effect to promote digital-tool use among seniors, especially those related to basic health assessment. This feedback loop helps seniors see digital tools as valuable and will help increase technology adoption.

Technology is here neither to ruin an elderly's life nor make it more complicated. It's the other way around. Technology can help them become more informed to make better, sound decisions. Seniors should embrace it. Keeping up with tech is fun and easy.

<https://www.nst.com.my/opinion/columnists/2021/12/753284/make-technology-senior-friendly>