

The social media opens up a whole new world to senior citizens, from entertainment to business opportunities.



NEW MEDIA, OLD SCHOOL

THE majority of senior citizens in Malaysia have yet to benefit from mobile connectivity, according to Telenor Group.

The global operator with mobile operations in 13 markets recently released an article, *The Unconnected Senior Citizens Of Asia*, based on data it collected from India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand.

In Malaysia, Telenor's DiGi reports that only 3.9 per cent of the local user base is aged above 60. Thirty eight per cent of subscribers above 69 use smartphones and 31 per cent use mobile data. Highlighting that the ageing populations will be a major factor in the economic and social development of the entire region in the near future, Telenor suggests that seniors should be encouraged into connectivity to prevent social isolation as well as increasing and prolonging their productivity.

The article cites: "Elderly exclusion from the mobile information revolution is, to some extent, true throughout the developing world: Pew Research's study of Internet usage across emerging and developing nations demonstrated that younger people (18 to 34) are more likely to have accessed the Internet than their older counterparts in every country polled, including differences of more than 15 percentage points in all but three countries studied. The correlation of prosperity and Internet usage is also reflected in Pew's findings in Asia, which reveal that 14 per cent of Thais and 17 per cent of Malaysians over the age of 50 use the Internet or own a smartphone, versus 7 per cent, 5 per cent, and 2 per cent of the same demographic in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, respectively; the figures should be compared to those of China, where a full 25 per cent of the 50+ segment report regularly using the Internet or owning a smartphone."

Dr Mohd Faizal Kasmani, director of Strategic Communication Centre (StraComm), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) agrees but he remains positive that senior citizens here can be introduced to the connected lifestyle



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much easier today as technology gets more user-friendly and social media is offering compelling ways to keep them up to date with their loved ones.

"The data on the Internet penetration shows that those aged 20-24 make up the biggest proportion of internet users in Malaysia. Seventy three per cent of youth aged from 16 to 24 are accessing the Internet but only 35 per cent of citizens aged 55 and above are accessing the Internet," he says.

"Malaysia is still considered a young country with about 3 million citizens over 60. So the impact of social media usage among this age group is not really felt at the moment. But 20 years from now, the age group will represent more than 30 per cent of the population and they will make up a significant user segment of social media."

Mohd Faizal says that senior citizens getting on board social media is inevitable. "Firstly, social media allows them to keep in touch with friends and family and that is the most important especially as often, family members are not staying together anymore. So they want to know what their son, daughters or grandchildren are doing, to share pictures and more," he says.

"Secondly, social media, particularly Facebook, is where they can learn and explore new things and get more information about things that interest them. Here, they can find groups that share their interests and make new friends.


"Another driving factor is that senior citizens have the time and money. Social media allows them to find entertainment, watch movies, read books, news and magazines. They can also create online businesses and take business opportunities via social media."

On the note of social media, he highlights several trends. "The worldwide trend, particularly in the US, shows an increase in Facebook usage among senior citizens; they are the fastest growing demographic on Facebook," he says.

At the same time, Facebook's popularity among certain user groups, especially teenagers, may not experience growth. "Facebook is likely to remain the biggest social media platform but it will move at a slower pace particularly when teenagers, who are the biggest user of social media, switch to more private and niche social media apps such as Instagram, Tumblr, Snapchat and such. The problem with Facebook is that its timeline is becoming overcrowded with information and messages.

For teenagers in particular, it is not cool anymore to post messages on Facebook on a regular basis especially when they have dad, mum, brothers, sisters as well as the uncles and aunts in their neighbourhood on their Facebook friends lists," he notes.

As such, the usage of social media is expected to be more private, niche and segmented, says Mohd Faizal. "The overcrowded nature of social media together with its chaotic nature will lead to paid and verified content being the preferred choice in the future. Users will consume the content that they can trust among the overcrowded timeline of information, most of which is evidently less truthful nowadays."

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